

Friendship, Love, and Brotherhood
in Medieval Northern Europe,
c. 1000-1200



Lars Hermanson



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Friendship, Love, and Brotherhood in Medieval Northern Europe, c. 1000–1200

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PEOPLES, ECONOMIES AND CULTURES

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Friendship, Love, and Brotherhood in Medieval Northern Europe, c. 1000–1200

By

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Lars Hermanson

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Introduction

1 Friendship and Self-Interest

Job. 3.7 Behold, let that night be barren;
let no joyful cry enter it.
8 Let those curse it who curse the day,
who are ready to rouse up Leviathan.

Job. 41.1 “Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook
or press down his tongue with a cord?
2 Can you put a rope in his nose
or pierce his jaw with a hook?

Job. 41.18 His sneezings flash forth light,
and his eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn.
19 Out of his mouth go flaming torches;
sparks of fire leap forth.
20 Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke,
as from a boiling pot and burning rushes.
21 His breath kindles coals,
and a flame comes forth from his mouth.
22 In his neck abides strength,
and terror dances before him.

Job. 41.33 On earth there is not his like,
a creature without fear.
34 He sees everything that is high;
he is king over all the sons of pride”.¹

The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes's book *Leviathan* appeared in 1651. The work takes its name from the terrible monster in the book of Job. Hobbes uses the beast as a metaphor for society, which must be kept on a tight rein to prevent total anarchy.² The counter to this was the totalitarian state controlled

1 *The Holy Bible: Old Testament*: Job. 3.7–8; 41.1–2; 41.18–22; 41.33–34.

2 According to Barbara H. Rosenwein, Leviathan is “a kind of person – a ‘mortal God’, as Hobbes put it – made up of the very people over whom it looms”. B.H. Rosenwein, 2016, pp. 300–301.

by “the sovereign”, who had absolute and indivisible power. Without him society would collapse and decline to “the natural state”. This was characterized, according to Hobbes, by war of every man against every man, because humans are basically governed by the instinct for self-preservation and self-interest:

So that in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory. The first maketh men invade for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation. The first use violence, to make themselves masters of other men's persons, wives, children, and cattle; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their persons or by reflection in their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession, or their name. Hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war as is of every man against every man. [...] Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every man, the same consequent to the time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is no [...] account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.³

For Hobbes, then, the strong state is the only protection against man's destructive character, which has the inevitable consequence that his insecurity leads him to attack his fellow men. The people therefore had to subject themselves by contract to the representative of the totalitarian government, Leviathan.⁴ They had to fear the absolute prince, but the social contract also meant that he pledged to protect people from each other.

In the society of the High Middle Ages the hierarchical state with its institutions, laws, and ordinances was still just a political theory with little validity in practice.⁵ Instead people had to rely on other means for their personal security. This society was thus essentially different from the state society of early

³ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 8.

⁴ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 14. In Hobbes's time, the term Leviathan could designate the people who constitute society and a ruling prince. N. Malcolm, 2007, pp. 29–58. In the social contract, the people accept Leviathan's laws which prohibit actions arising from passions. According to Barbara H. Rosenwein, “the Leviathan creates an ‘emotional regime’ that keeps individual motions in check”. B.H. Rosenwein, 2016, p. 301. On the concept of “emotional regime” see W. Reddy, 2001, p. 129.

⁵ The term “High Middle Ages” refers to the period c. 1000–1300.

modern and modern time. Violence is ever-present in the medieval sources. At first glimpse they convey an impression of a state of anarchy and chaos, which could be described in Hobbes's words as "war of every man against every man". European chronicles, saints' legends, law codes, and letters, along with Scandinavian historical works and Icelandic sagas, paint a picture of a society permeated by constant conflict. The sources tell of wars, feuds, and brutal power struggles where all means seem to have been permissible. Was this use of violence totally arbitrary, or was there some kind of order in the chaos?

The material remains left by the elite cultures of the Iron Age and the Early Middle Ages demonstrate that violence was not the only source of power. In several Scandinavian chieftains' graves it is not weapons that dominate among the grave goods. Instead the prime status objects are rings, silver spoons, and richly decorated beakers.⁶ The beakers and silver spoons were symbols of peace treaties with powerful foreign princes. These alliances were often established at banquets where the parties drank a ritual toast of peace to confirm the pact they had made. Luxury beakers or glasses shaped like horns were therefore common gifts that Scandinavian chieftains brought home from their military expeditions in Europe. The ring was (and is) a classical symbol of alliance, representing fidelity, which explains why the outstanding prestige objects among the grave finds are often solid gold rings.

Remains of this type thus show that the Scandinavian princes belonged to extensive networks comprising significant parts of Europe. The power positions formerly enjoyed by the deceased were therefore manifested not primarily with weapons but with peace symbols reflecting that the chieftains had powerful friends. These materialized memories of earthly life then functioned as status markers for the souls when they came to the other world. Ties of friendship were thus a fundamental element in the social and political organization of societies without writing.

If we then study the medieval written sources in more detail, we see clearly that they do not merely describe an endless series of conflicts. The authors are at least as concerned with recording how the conflicts were resolved; how people went about avoiding strife; and how they attempted strategically to achieve their goals through cooperation. It is striking how often the sources here employ the terms friendship and love – that is to say, the very antitheses of Hobbes's self-interest and self-preservation instinct.⁷ Friendship and

6 Examples are the Hoby grave on the island of Lolland, the Himlingøje cemetery and the Ellekilde chamber grave on Sjælland. For Hoby and Himlingøje, see B. Storgaard, 2003, pp. 111 ff.; J. Jensen, 2003, pp. 311 ff., 432 ff. On the Ellekilde chamber grave, see R. Iversen, 2014, pp. 133–144.

7 Hobbes's view of man and society also differed significantly from that of classical thinkers. Sacharias Votinius has a penetrating discussion of these different outlooks, comparing Hobbes's view of man with those of Socrates and Aristotle. S. Votinius, 2004, pp. 129–159.

love were not, as today, associated with an intimate relationship between two persons in the private sphere. Instead the bonds were in the highest degree a part of the public sphere, and it was rare for any distinction to be made between friendship and love.⁸

The lack of a public judicial system meant that the individual's security was dependent on the social collective. Personal connections such as ties of kinship and friendship played a prominent role here.⁹ The family and the household guaranteed security in the private and the public sphere. Horizontal and vertical bonds of friendship supplemented these communities, both in social life and in the political arena.¹⁰

Excavations of the medieval town of Lödöse, located on the west coast of Sweden, have uncovered numerous runic inscriptions carved on everyday objects made of wood, bone, and lead. Some of these inscriptions give a snapshot of what love and ties of friendship meant to medieval people. On a stick dated to the middle of the twelfth century someone wrote: "Arnfinn, remain my friend ... whatever happens".¹¹ Another inscription from the same period was carved on a tool, probably used in weaving. The text reads: "Think of me, I think of you. Love me, I love you".¹² (Figs. 1–3) Despite the laconic character of these fragmentary texts, they let us hear voices from the twelfth century which testify to the significance of friendship, love, and trust for medieval people's security and social life.

Hobbes's grim warning, that man's instinct for self-preservation and fear of insecurity lead to war of every man against every man, undoubtedly has some justification. Yet this is a general thesis which is applicable to all types of societies, irrespective of time and place. But it is not true that the sovereign state, historically, is the only guaranteed way to avoid the uncontrolled use of force. In the Middle Ages bonds of friendship were used both for cooperation and for competition. Ultimately it was a matter of achieving security, but the bonds were also used in order to create and consolidate power. This fact was known to Hobbes, who wrote in *Leviathan* that "to have servants is power; to

8 The medieval sources were mostly written by male authors and the majority of them concern love and friendship between men.

9 In the medieval source material it is common for relatives to be called friends. See e.g. M. Bloch, 1971a (1st ed. 1939), pp. 123 f.

10 According to Sandra Bell and Simon Coleman, anthropologists and sociologists often contrast friendship with kinship as "achievement/voluntarism versus ascription/constraint". S. Bell & S. Coleman, 1999, pp. 3 ff.

11 GI 3035. E. Svärdström, 1974, pp. 37–39.

12 GI 1961. E. Svärdström, 1974, pp. 36–37.



FIGURE. 1 Rune stick from Lödöse, front side
PHOTO: LARS HERMANSON



FIGURE. 2 Rune stick from Lödöse, back side
PHOTO: LARS HERMANSON



FIGURE. 3 Rune stick from Lödöse
PHOTO: LARS HERMANSON

have friends is power: for they are strengths united".¹³ In seventeenth-century England, as in the High Middle Ages, bonds of friendship were employed to build social networks and establish political alliances. Different forms of confederations, sealed with promises of eternal friendship and love, occur frequently in the medieval sources. These concepts represented trust (*fides*), which was a fundamental condition if politics was to function at all.

¹³ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 10.

Was friendship in medieval society associated solely with power, realpolitik, and the individual's security? The answer to that question must be an unambiguous "no". A bond of friendship had more than just a practical function in structuring society. It was also an ideological foundation in constituting society. According to Hobbes's ideology, absolute authority was the only way to prevent the anarchy that had broken out under Cromwell's rule.¹⁴ He thus had no faith whatever in the ability of individual humans to work for a common cause through collective collaboration. Medieval philosophers and theologians, however, represented a completely different outlook on humanity and society. The world around them might have been torn by violence and conflict, but their religious and political ideas did not reflect a mentality of violence; far from it, their message was one of peace and love.

During the twelfth-century renaissance a political discourse arose concerning how "the good society" ought to be built up. The scholars took their arguments from the classical philosophers and the Christian theologians of late antiquity.¹⁵ The visions were different, but a shared feature was that the medieval thinkers emphasized the role of friendship ties as the pillars of a good society. In doing so they put their faith in the ability of the individual to cooperate in order to accomplish ideas of a better world. The prince should not rule through fear, which was equated with tyranny, but should instead love his subjects and call them his friends. The friendship intended in this context was not personal relations between individuals, but collective friendship.

Unlike Hobbes, this ideology was thus not just political but also spiritual. The model for ideal government was not the sovereign prince but Augustine's City of God where the centre of power was the Lord himself.¹⁶ The dualistic

14 Hobbes was primarily warning against the dangers of democracy. Yet his book justified Cromwell's new parliamentary authority just as much as it defended the absolute power of the monarchy. The people simply had to obey the regime that protected them. B.H. Rosenwein, 2016, p. 288. It may seem strange that Hobbes gives the totalitarian regime the name of the primeval biblical monster Leviathan with its highly negative connotations of the Antichrist. Giorgio Agamben, however, says that Hobbes's concept of the state must be viewed in an eschatological perspective where the marine monster representing submission to the "Commonwealth" coexisted in a complex relationship with the other ancient monster in the Bible, Behemoth. This beast was the Leviathan's terrestrial counterpart and opposite in that Behemoth symbolized civil war and anarchy. The Leviathan regime was a secular stage hastening the coming of the kingdom of God. This kingdom, however, could not be achieved until Behemoth and Leviathan had destroyed each other. G. Agamben, 2015, pp. 41, 51, 53.

15 Cicero asserted in *De Re Publica* that the state (*res publica*) was a collection of people united through a shared idea of what was right (*iuris consensu*) and what benefited them all (*utilitatis communione*). Cicero, *De Re Publica*, 1, 39.

16 Augustine himself, however, never equated the City of God with the theocratically ordered and governed state on earth. The City of God (*civitas Dei*) and the Earthly City

outlook of Christianity, where medieval people perceived that their existence consisted of two worlds, meant that the celestial world was constantly present. The interactional relationship between the two worlds was reflected in the view of friendship as both a utilitarian and a spiritual bond. Friendship and love were the strongest spiritual bonds in that they were links to God and the kingdom of heaven. The Christian notion of brotherhood saw all believers as brothers, who should therefore work together to bring about the idea of the City of God. This brings us to yet another central concept that was of great significance in the medieval social structure: brotherhood. This society was permeated by a group culture, which meant that there was no overall authority controlling social and political communities. Instead it was a pluralistic societal organization consisting of a multitude of communities.¹⁷

We can consequently draw the conclusion that the terms friendship, love, and brotherhood were basic constituent elements as regards both how medieval political culture functioned in practice and how this society was envisaged as functioning in the ideology. If we allow ourselves a modern sociological interpretation here, we could say that the phenomena of friendship, love, and brotherhood were the bridge between structure and actor. We see here the main lines in what made medieval society essentially different, not just from our own society but also from Thomas Hobbes's times. There is thus a political and ideological watershed between the Middle Ages on the one hand and the early modern and modern periods on the other.

2 Friendship as a Research Topic

It is only in recent decades that historians have begun to take an interest in the significance of bonds of friendship in medieval society. In earlier research this relationship was seldom an object of detailed study. This was (and to some extent still is) because historians were largely concerned with problems related to the development of the state and the forming of the nation. We naturally cannot accuse these scholars of being influenced by Thomas Hobbes's ideology, but they nevertheless show the imprint of an evolutionist outlook on the state, which occupies such a prominent position in their historical analysis.

(*civitas terrena*) were symbols respectively of those who lived in harmony with God and those who did not. In all societies the two cities were mixed and would not be separated until Judgement Day. FL, p. 49.

17 Susan Reynolds uses the term "communities". S. Reynolds, 1984. See also T. Reuter, 1997, pp. 177–208; F. Cheyette, 2003.

Interpreters of the period that is often called “the feudal era” or “the pre-state society” perhaps do not convey an image of a society in total anarchy, but it is always contrasted with the more civilized and sophisticated state – that is to say, the societal formation “that would come later”. The High Middle Ages is thus pictured as a preliminary stage in a process of development. This means that scholars have rarely examined how the political culture functioned and how social order was maintained in societies that lacked a hierarchical state apparatus. The politics of the time has instead been interpreted within a framework studying the gradual accomplishment of the institutional exercise of power.

In this connection the explanations of the change in society have been dominated by organisational approaches. Many scholars have proceeded from conflict perspectives according to which historical development is driven by antagonisms between parties, ideologies, classes, and institutions. Other historians have applied a consensus perspective, emphasizing the collaborative element in the formation of society; the assumption here is that there is agreement about certain basic values that hold a society together, which means that its members must adapt to the cultural expectations, norms, and roles that society needs for its continued existence.

What these outlooks on history have in common is that the individual's will and actions are regarded as subordinate to the structures. It is thus natural that personal phenomena such as ties of friendship have not attracted the interest of historians. Friendship has been viewed solely as an emotional relationship belonging to the private sphere, and therefore this bond has been overlooked in explanations of politics, social organization, and structural changes. Researchers have been fully aware of the existence of friendship pacts as a phenomenon, but the fact that these alliances were separate from the state's formalized hierarchy has meant that no significance has been ascribed to them for the organization of society as a whole. That friendship has not been deemed important as a structuring element in society is, above all, a consequence of the tendency of constitutionally oriented historians to base their analyses on a distinction between state and society – between public and private.

In recent decades, however, the pendulum has swung towards actor-related historical studies where scholars focus on people by investigating their action strategies and their mental world. These analyses are geared to studying the socio-political interaction between individuals and collectives. In this context personal relations play a crucial role, and here friendship is an important constituent. This shift can partly be viewed as a result of the extensive critique of structuralism in the 1960s and 1970s from sociologists and

anthropologists.¹⁸ Yet the liberal constitutional outlook on history had already been questioned in the 1930s by the historian Otto Brunner. He thought that these scholars (chiefly legal historians) represented a modern view of history and thus lacked the necessary tools for analysing social organizations not based on a distinction between state and society, power and justice, or public and private.¹⁹

In the Anglo-American research environment, a group of medieval historians at the end of the 1960s began to challenge state-centred research by pointing out that it was too obsessed with studying the rise and development of institutions, and consequently ignoring the significance of informal ties. This circle of anthropologically trained scholars studied topics such as the role played by personal bonds in the accumulation and exercise of power in pre-state European society. One representative of this research group was Fredric Cheyette, who declared that

the reality of power was not in the abstract “institutions” described by so many generations of legal historians and historians of social “structures”, but in personal status, networks, and relationships and the familiar practices that embodied them.²⁰

Cheyette argued that historians should not primarily be searching for structures or dividing history into different types (“species”) of society but instead focus on the actors’ strategies: “we look at particular ways of doing things: social habits, practices, processes [...] each of which may follow its own timeline, and have its own particular history”.²¹ This trend has since been termed

18 See e.g. Jeremy Boissevain’s or Pierre Bourdieu’s critique of structural functionalism. J. Boissevain 1978 (1st ed. 1974), pp. 5 f.; P. Bourdieu 1977, pp. 7 ff. Structural-functionalist anthropology often typologized different societies according to a system of stages in the evolution of the state. See e.g. H. Claessen & J.M. Skalnik, 1978. See also Michel Foucault’s critique of traditional power analysis centred on the problem of sovereignty, such as searching for the centre of power or studying the person of the ruler. M. Foucault, 1980, pp. 121 ff. Foucault advocates a strategic concept of power focused on practice and mechanisms, in contrast to the traditional focus on essence and form. G. Deleuze, 1988 (1986), pp. 70–93; N. Stenlås, 1998, p. 42. See also Steven Lukes’ problematization of the analysis of power. S. Lukes, 2005 (1974). Back in 1971 Jacques Le Goff argued that a new political history ought to be written which included methods and perspectives from other social sciences. See J. Le Goff, 1971, pp. 1–19.

19 H. Kaminsky & J. Van Horn Melton, 1992, p. xix; O. Brunner, 1939.

20 F. Cheyette, 2003, p. 257. See also P. Bourdieu on the concepts of *strategy* and *practice*. P. Bourdieu, 1977; P. Bourdieu, 1990 (1980).

21 F. Cheyette, 2003, p. 259. Similar perspectives had previously been put forward by anthropologists who criticized the structural-functionalist model of society. Jeremy Boissevain

“legal anthropology” and the change in outlook has been called “the anthropological turn”.²² These historians study the mechanisms of “the gift society”, conflict resolution and judicial culture, the role of rituals in maintaining social order, and questions of gender and social formation in pre-modern society.²³ Studies of friendship ties are important elements in all these research fields.

This perspective has also gained ground among historians who have studied the socio-political structure of medieval Icelandic society. Researchers such as Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, William I. Miller, Jesse L. Byock, Helgi Þorláksson, and Auður Magnúsdóttir have done penetrating studies of the Icelandic sagas where bonds of friendship are identified as playing an important part in the pre-state political culture.²⁴

In earlier social anthropology a knowledge of the kinship systems of pre-state societies was regarded as the key to understanding the social order.²⁵ Today, however, anthropologists study a much broader range of relations. Besides biological kinship, scholars see a crucial significance in friendship and ritualized relation such as godparenthood, fostering, and brotherhood for the creation of social organizations.²⁶ This has also become a distinctive feature of legal anthropology, which emphasizes that medieval society was a pluralistic social organization. These historians therefore explore the interaction between, for example, the establishment of bonds of friendship, gift-giving,

writes, for example, that we must ask questions about how social organizations arise and how they change: “We must be able to explain the *is*, the *being*, and the *becoming* of social institutions”. J. Boissevain, 1978 (1st ed. 1974), p. 5. He also thinks that many leaders appear to possess power not because of their formal roles but thanks to their carefully cultivated but changing systems of contacts.

22 For research surveys of the turn to legal anthropology, see K. Esmark, 2006, pp. 3–22; H.J. Orning, K. Esmark, L. Hermanson, 2010, pp. 5–38; H.J. Orning, K. Esmark, 2013, pp. 1–30. For a survey of research on rituals, performativity, and social order, see e.g. L. Hermanson, 2015, pp. 1–21. On the “performative turn” in research, see e.g. S.F. Moore & B.G. Myerhoff, 1977, pp. 3–24; J. Martchukat & S. Patzold, 2003, pp. 1–32.

23 E.g. F. Cheyette, 1970; J. Le Goff, 1971; S.D. White, 1988; B.H. Rosenwein, 1989; G. Althoff, 1990; D. Barthélemy, 1990; G. Koziol, 1992a; A. Weiner, 1992; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1993; P. Geary, 1994a; C.S. Jaeger, 1999; M.H. Gelting, 1999; L.I. Hansen, 1999; L. Hermanson, 2000; Auður Magnúsdóttir 2001; J. Rüdiger, 2001; K. Esmark, 2002; H.J. Orning 2004; C. Andersson, 2006, 2013; H. Vogt, 2013. The Russian scholar Aron Gurevich was early in drawing attention to the significance of gifts and personal bonds in the medieval social organization. See e.g. A. Gurevich, 1968, pp. 126–138; A. Gurevich, 1979.

24 Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1993, 1995, 2007, 2013a, 2017; W.I. Miller, 1990; J.L. Byock, 1982, 1988; Auður Magnúsdóttir, 2001; Helgi Þorláksson, 2001, pp. 91 ff.

25 L.I. Hansen, 1999, pp. 33 f.

26 S. Gudeman, 1971; J. Pitt Rivers, 1973; S. Bell & S. Coleman, 1999.

and conflict resolution. In this connection, rituals and socioreligious interaction play a decisive role in creating order.

This research has also considerably broadened the historical analysis of power. From having formerly comprised primarily politics, economic conditions, institutions, and the administration of justice, the framework has been expanded to include ideology, theology, the use of language, norms, and value systems.²⁷ The traditional tendency to regard historical actors as being steered by economic structures or thirst for power has thus changed in favour of a recognition of individuals' active roles in various interwoven spheres – whether social, religious, economic, or legal.

Constitutional power analyses, by analogy with Hobbes, proceeded from the existence of a fixed political structure dominated by a public authority. The focus was on investigating how governance worked by explaining how the other parts of the structure were controlled and administered. Power was consequently studied from a top-down perspective. In the expanded power analysis, scholars instead proceed from a dynamic power structure where personal liaisons play a significant part. This means that they apply a perspective that examines how power is practised on different levels in social life. Detecting the power centre is thus of subordinate importance. Instead researchers discuss how power is created, exercised, maintained, and recreated, for example, through the use of horizontal and vertical bonds. This research focus is thus interested in how politics actually functions and how power is manifested and established at different levels – that is to say, the political culture itself. The origin of this strategic definition of power cannot be found in Hobbes but in Machiavelli.²⁸ The expanded power analysis has had major consequences for

27 This multidisciplinary method is also a characteristic feature of the history of mentalities. Historical studies of ideology and theology had been pursued since the nineteenth century, but what was new in modern historical anthropology was the combination of many disciplines.

28 This strategic outlook is thus akin to post-modern theories of power as represented for instance by Michel Foucault. Zygmunt Bauman claimed, for example, that Machiavelli was "post-modern" before modernism. Z. Bauman, cited in S.R. Clegg, 1989, p. 5. Stewart Clegg (like Michel Foucault) lets Hobbes and Machiavelli illustrate different outlooks on power. Hobbes thus proceeded from a sovereign source of power. Scholars influenced by this modern perspective on power have therefore studied governing macro-actors as representatives of the state. At the centre are the forms and structures of the state. Machiavelli discussed instead how power functioned in practice. The actors' strategies and the mechanisms of power were thus in focus. S.R. Clegg, 1989, pp. 4 ff., pp. 22–38. Stewart Clegg says that Machiavelli's fixation on strategy "leads him to a view of reality not as reflecting the order granted by a beneficent sovereign but as an arena in which such order

the interpretation of conflicts in historical societies in that there has been a shift from macro-perspectives to micro-perspectives. Research has thus tended to go from exploring oppositions between classes or institutions to study conflicts between groups and individuals belonging to social networks.²⁹

An interest in medieval people's personal liaisons and emotional relations, however, is in no way specific to legal anthropology. This research field has been studied for some time in the history of mentalities.³⁰ At first this trend was highly structuralist in character. This changed through time, however, to become more focused on medieval and early modern people as individuals, with their ideas and emotional life at the centre.³¹ It then seemed natural to examine attitudes to friendship and love. In fact, the most comprehensive analyses of friendship have been presented within this research field, where Brian McGuire's in-depth study of monastic friendship, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience 350–1250*, is now a classic.³² Another later Nordic example is Eva Österberg's *Vänskap – en lång historia* ("Friendship: A Long Story"), where friendship is considered in longitudinal perspective from ancient to modern times. The author has a detailed discussion of the role of friendship in the grey zone between the private and the public.

may be secured by the strategically mindful prince [...]. The focus is on strategies, deals, negotiation, fraud and conflict in which myths concerning moral action become game-players' resources rather than a topic which frames what the game should be". S.R. Clegg, 1989, p. 30. This Machiavellian perspective thus resembles in many ways the extended power analysis applied by historians with an orientation to legal anthropology.

29 Research on friendship thus runs counter to the earlier Marxist structural analysis in that it often studies interaction between individuals instead of antagonisms between social classes. For a survey of Nordic research on friendship and patronage, see L. Hermanson *et al.*, 2007.

30 The roots of this interest can be traced back to nineteenth-century cultural history, which was in many respects akin to the history of mentalities. On the concept of mentality, see A. Florén & M. Persson, 1985, pp. 189–203.

31 Sometimes this trend is categorized as "the third generation of the *Annales* school", as represented by Emmanuel le Roy Ladurie and Aron Gurevich. Yet the anthropological perspective had already been applied by the pioneers of the *Annales* school. This is mainly expressed in works by Marc Bloch, such as *Les rois thaumaturges* from 1924.

32 The book was published in 1988 and a second, revised edition appeared in 2010. The ideological discourse of friendship, its practice and performative expressions in late medieval society have been examined in detail by Klaus Oschema in his dissertation which studied fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Burgundy. K. Oschema, 2006b. The role of friendship in medieval society has been treated in depth in Julian Haseldine (ed.), 1999a, and A. Classen & M. Sandridge (eds.), 2010 (which also deals with the early modern period). Friendship and love are also a prominent theme in the history of emotions as studied by scholars such as Barbara H. Rosenwein, see e.g. B.H. Rosenwein, 2016.

Both legal anthropology and the history of mentalities have primarily dealt with societies where the state apparatus is weakly developed. The most fundamental difference between the two orientations is that anthropologically coloured studies often concern how power is exercised in pre-state societies – unlike the analyses of mentalities which rarely consider this problem. As a result of this, research on friendship in medieval society can mainly be divided into two branches.

One branch investigates friendship as a political phenomenon, while the other takes an interest in the spiritual and emotional aspects of friendship. The political focus treats friendship from a power perspective, viewing the bond as a pragmatic instrument associated with lordship, the formation of alliances, and the resolution of conflicts. The central problem concerns organization, control, and socio-political interaction.³³

The other angle examines the individual's notions of friendship and devotes little attention to political power. Scholars here study medieval people's mentality, ideology, philosophy, theology, and ethics. The focus is on Christian spiritual friendship, as represented by the monastic movement and the secular church.³⁴ Both branches study networks and communication, but with different aims. From the political perspective, network-building is viewed through ties of friendship as a means to power. The spiritual outlook instead studies the function of networks for medieval people's intellectual and emotional interaction.

3 Thesis

In this book I argue the thesis that the power perspective need not be a watershed. Ideology, beliefs, and emotions were integral parts of medieval political culture. Emotional conceptual pairs such as friendship and love, anger and hate, represented not only emotional states but also political states and strategic instruments.³⁵ My aim is therefore to present three different studies showing how the division between the two research trends – on politics and the history of mentalities – can be bridged. The thesis is that the political and spiritual aspects concerning the phenomenon of friendship cannot be so easily separated into two different spheres. This sharp distinction, in my opinion,

33 One example is Gerd Althoff's book *Verwandte, Freunde und Getreue: Zum politischen Stellenwert der Gruppenbindungen im früheren Mittelalter*, Darmstadt, 1990.

34 An example is McGuire's book mentioned above.

35 F. Cheyette, 2001, p. 199; B.H. Rosenwein (ed.), 1998; H.J. Orning, 2008.

was alien to medieval thought. It might of course be considered wrong to combine the two angles because they serve different purposes in that they belong to different traditions: political, anthropological, and social history versus the history of culture, ideas, and religion. But the question is this: Can we, on the one hand, reach an understanding of medieval people's mentality, emotions, and ideas without caring about problems of social order and political control? And can we, on the other hand, comprehend the political and social organization without any knowledge of medieval people's thoughts, beliefs, norms, and ideals?³⁶

The history of mentalities, like studies of friendship and networks, has often been criticized by scholars of constitutional or economic history. They argue that it cannot be considered particularly surprising that individuals in pre-modern times had friends and established social networks. Why waste so much time and effort analysing this? These scholars represent the view that the terminology in the medieval sources for friendship and love is chiefly an expression of social conventions with no profound meaning for society. Furthermore, it has been claimed that research in the history of mentalities and legal anthropology has never engaged in any detailed discussion of historical processes.³⁷ As a result, no interesting questions are raised because the necessary tools are lacking to investigate how fundamental changes in society come about.

I must admit that these questions are justified. We must be able to explain why ties of friendship are interesting for historical studies and how these analyses can contribute to a greater understanding of structures and processes in historical societies. The purpose of this book is therefore to elucidate some problem areas that studies of friendship can shed light on, and the theoretical and methodological tools that can be applied to reach a deeper understanding, not only of the political culture of medieval society but also how this culture was related to the spiritual belief and ideology of the time. The aim is thus to study how ties of friendship both structured society and constituted it.

36 Brian McGuire argues that the political trend risks reducing the historical actors to strategically calculating individuals whose chief goal in life was power, while the spiritual angle runs the risk of losing contact with people's everyday life and the social order in the Middle Ages. B.P. McGuire, 2010, p. lxiii.

37 Later research in the *Annales* tradition, however, has often studied radical changes to society. These historians work with flows of time which can be divided into three levels or "conjunctures": *Longue durée* = tenacious structures of long duration. *Moyenne durée* = historical processes of medium duration. *Les événements* = the significance of individual events. See e.g. F. Braudel, 1985 (first ed. 1949).

4 The Outline of the Book

The study is limited to the period from the start of the eleventh century to the early thirteenth century. As for the geographical limits, the study chiefly concerns the parts of Europe included in the Scandinavian/Norman/Flemish cultural sphere. The focus in the analysis is on Denmark and Norway, but illustrative examples are also cited from sources about Flanders and Normandy. The period has been chosen because there were extensive political, social, and ideological changes in society in the High Middle Ages. *Politically*: in that the countries of northern and western Europe switched from a traditional form of lordship based on the direct exercise of power, via personal connections – to a different hierarchical model of lordship based on indirect wielding of power, via institutions. *Socially*: in that new social groups were developed, which would later lead to the rise of the society of the estates. *Ideologically*: in that new ideologies were created for interpreting, legitimizing, or criticizing the new social order. This makes it possible to analyse a radical historical change in the light of the concepts of friendship, love, and brotherhood. To be able to paint a complete picture of this transformation, the study will be placed in a broader geographical context that also comprises development in western Europe.

In earlier research this transformation of society has chiefly been studied from constitutional or economic perspectives by historians who have made a distinction between, on the one hand, a feudal Europe that is said to have been dominated by a system of fiefs and vassals and, on the other hand, a non-feudal Scandinavia characterized by a different social and political structure called “the kin society”.³⁸ I will not use that division here. Instead I emphasize the similarities between Scandinavian and European political culture.³⁹ The Scandinavian source material shows no fundamental differences from the European evidence as regards the political functions or the ideological role of friendship. This means that the aim is not merely to elucidate Scandinavia against a European background, but also to show how studies of the Scandinavian source material can contribute to a better understanding of the situation in Europe.

³⁸ L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 15–44.

³⁹ Scandinavia, of course, belongs to Europe, but the formula “Scandinavia and Europe” is often used in research because historians believe that Scandinavia (often used loosely – here too – to mean all the Nordic countries) was gradually Europeanized and became a part of Europe during the High Middle Ages. See e.g. T. Lindkvist & P. Ingesman (eds.), 2001.

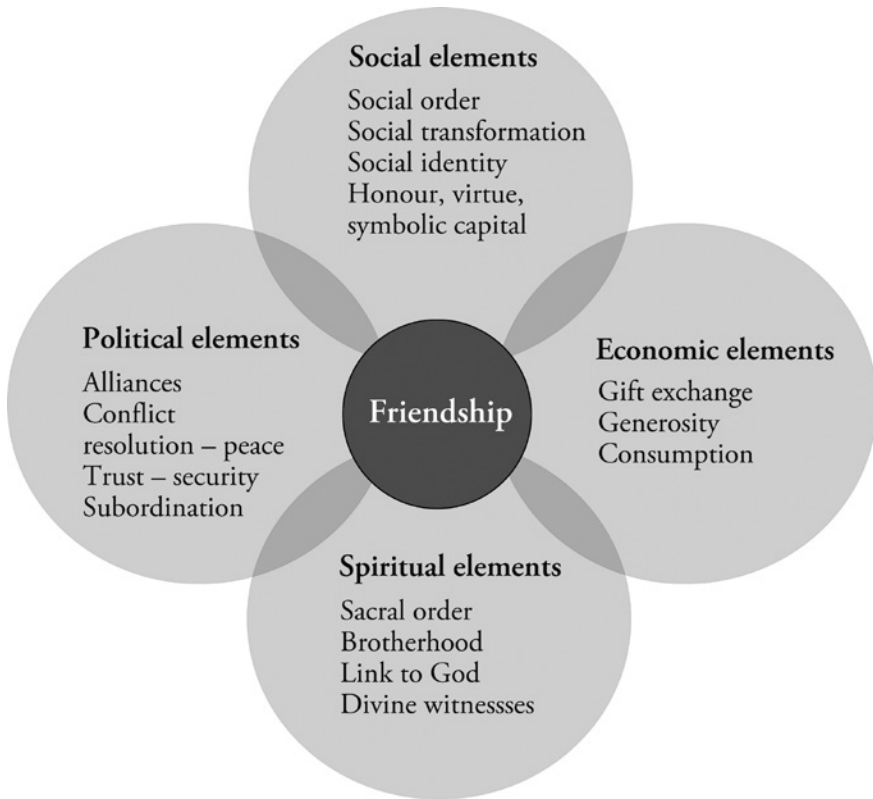


FIGURE. 4 Friendship as a “total social phenomenon”

To make it possible to demonstrate the interaction between the ideology and the practice of friendship, we must abandon the constitutional outlook on medieval society. I have therefore chosen to study friendship as a “total social phenomenon”.

This concept has been used by the anthropologist Marcel Mauss to define pre-modern societies that cannot be separated into different political, economic, legal, social, religious, and ideological spheres, since these were interwoven with and dependent on each other.⁴⁰ Yet this does not mean that I embrace a functionalist (or ontological) interpretation of society as a static,

⁴⁰ M. Mauss, 1966 (1923), pp. 17–45. For total social phenomena see also Karl Polanyi, who has analysed how economic systems function in pre-modern societies. K. Polanyi, 1957 (1st ed. 1944); K. Polanyi, 1968, pp. 207–335. Aron Gurevich has proceeded from Mauss’s theory in his studies of the Nordic gift society. A. Gurevich, 1968, pp. 126–138. See also K. Lunden, 1972.

self-regulating system. I would rather view the social order as being in a constant process of change, characterized by social relations that were not static but dynamic.⁴¹

The ideology of friendship is a theme that pervades the whole book. It is not possible, however, to proceed from a specific definition of the concept of ideology in a study that aims to combine the history of mentalities with the perspective of political power. What is relevant for this study is the definitions associated with the way people interpret their society and the world around them. Ideology then stands for the creation of meaning, symbols, and values in social life. The concept thus represents a wish, a vision, or a nostalgic idea of the good society. Friendship in this context is an important part of the world view of medieval man.

But the definitions of ideology that can be associated with legitimation also play an important role in this book. Ideology then refers to the complex of ideas characteristic, for example, of a specific social group aiming not just to create an identity for themselves but also to legitimize their position in society with the aid of the ideals and symbolism of friendship. Finally, the use of ideology as a means to legitimize power and lordship is of great significance in the present study. Ideologies here serve the purpose of accomplishing, consolidating, defending, and justifying a particular order of governance. This can be done by a ruling stratum legitimizing its power through promoting or transforming beliefs and values that underpin its dominant role in society. Such notions can be strategically confirmed by being presented, for example, as elements of a natural and universal order, and thus something to be taken for granted. An ideology of lordship also seeks to defame and exclude rival ideas and forms of government.⁴²

The reason I do not proceed from a fixed definition is that I analyse the bond of friendship as a total social phenomenon where the interaction between spiritual, social, and political spheres is central. In this connection it is not possible to find a centre of power and thus no overall ideology either. Ideologies of lordship must always act in interplay with society's existing norms, expectations, and beliefs if they are to have any impact.⁴³ In the creation of meaningful bonds between the ruler and the people ruled, there is thus an exchange of ideas between the two sides, so that ideologies are a result of a process of interaction. This communication involves a complex of ideas

41 See e.g. J. Boissevain, 1978, pp. 4–13, 26; M. Mann, 1986, p. 2.

42 On the definitions of ideology discussed above see T. Eagleton, 1991, pp. 1–31.

43 J. Elster, 1982, pp. 123–148.

concerning phenomena such as world view, spirituality, social identity, and the legitimization of hierarchies.

So that the reader will have some idea of the spiritual and ideological dimensions of friendship, we must begin by discussing the development of friendship as an intellectual concept. The medieval authors' view of friendship was based in large measure on doctrines with roots in classical antiquity. Chapter 1 therefore examines how the Greco-Roman philosophers and the theologians of late antiquity viewed friendship as a constitutive element of society. These theories were to be of great significance, especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, for the emergence of an intellectual spiritual and political discourse of friendship. Chapter 2 examines the role this discourse played in the process of social formation in northern and western Europe in the High Middle Ages. Here I discuss how the ideology of friendship was applied in order to shape identity and justify the prominent positions of different groups in society. The focus is on the written culture as represented by the ecclesiastical elite and the secular aristocracy. The interaction between ideology and practice is elucidated, partly through a look at the communicative aspects of friendship ties, partly through a study of how the Danish author Saxo Grammaticus legitimizes a specific elite stratum in society by combining spiritual and pragmatic ideals of friendship.

Chapter 3 deals with the way the ideology and practice of friendship met in the performative political culture as expressed in Scandinavia, Normandy, and Flanders. These regions were linked to each other through a common heritage and political alliances. However, the reason for comparing these areas is not based on the assumption that they represented a "specific community" in contrast to for example the Franks or the Germans. The basis in the sources of such an interpretation is quite slender. In fact, the performative culture showed similar patterns in Northern and Western Europe. Normandy and Flanders serve as comparative European examples in their capacity as being the focal point where Scandinavian, Anglo-Norman, Frankish and German political cultures converged.

Here I discuss the role played by sworn covenants in creating and maintaining the social order. The pact of friendship is thus placed within a ritual performative context where the ambition is to demonstrate the interaction between political, spiritual, social, and economic phenomena. Finally, Chapter 4 studies friendship from a strategic power perspective based on how the kings used ties of friendship to maintain and legitimize their rule. Here I study primarily the Danish and Norwegian kings. The main question concerns how the role of friendship changed in the exercise of power at the transition from traditional lordship to hierarchical kingship "by the grace of God", when the bonds were

gradually “ideologized” in pace with the growing influence of European culture. I do this by investigating how the kings went about implementing the Christian ideology of friendship in practice by grounding it in the group culture of medieval society.

If we are to understand the whole complex of ideas surrounding the medieval view of friendship, however, we must begin by searching for the ideological roots of friendship. We shall therefore go back to classical Greece and Rome, the sources of this intellectual heritage.

Ideas of Friendship, Love, and Brotherhood in Classical Philosophy

1 Friendship in Theory

The medieval authors' interpretations and discussions about the nature of friendship largely rested on a foundation that had been established in antiquity. The learned writers of the Early Middle Ages were thus in a constant dialogue, directly or indirectly, with the classical philosophers. Greek thinkers' perceptions of friendship, such as those of Pythagoras and Aristotle, were transmitted via Stoics and Epicureans to the Latin world of authors like Cicero and Seneca. These ideas about friendship and love were then interpreted within a Christian framework by the New Testament evangelists and the church fathers of late antiquity. In the intellectual oases of the Middle Ages, that is to say, the monasteries, the cathedral schools, the universities, and the princely courts, people studied classical sources such as Cicero's *De Amicitia* and florilegia – compendia of fragments from different ancient philosophers.¹ The Greek thinkers' discourses of friendship were thus indirectly present in the libraries available to the writers of the Carolingian renaissance and the twelfth century.

The ancient philosophers were primarily concerned with studying the inner essence of friendship and thus took only a limited interest in pragmatic friendship. The latter was a part of everyday life associated with the social, economic, and political sphere, and therefore seldom an object of philosophical speculation. The functions of pragmatic friendship ties were taken for granted in the ancient network-based society.² Instead the philosophers debated an intellectual friendship revolving around ethics, theology, and different ideals concerning man's inner quality. The classical thinkers discussed how the individual's inner properties and actions were dependent on relations to his fellow man. It thus felt natural that emotions played a prominent role in this discourse of friendship.

1 It was not until the era of scholasticism and the late thirteenth century that direct study of Aristotle's writing began. The first Latin translation of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* was produced by Robert Grosseteste c. 1246/7.

2 G. Herman, 1987, pp. 6, 32, 74–95, 129.

To understand the medieval authors' views of friendship and love we must begin by familiarizing ourselves with the ancient theoretical ideas about friendship.³ This will give insight not only into the background to the medieval authors' ideals of social interaction, but also into how they viewed themselves as individuals and how they explained the individual's relation to, and dependence on, a larger whole. It is thus among the classical thinkers that we find the roots of the medieval perception of spiritual friendship, which should consequently be regarded as a theoretical idea with an intellectual origin.

A study of the growth of the doctrine of friendship and love could easily develop into a beautiful story forming a kind of ideological counter to traditional history with its wars and conflicts, power hunger and greed. We should bear in mind, however, that the ideology, in both classical and medieval times, was used in vastly different contexts, for example to legitimize power and lordship or to distinguish specific groups of higher rank in society. The classical ideology of friendship was characterized by elitist ideas. One explanation for this is that the philosophers of antiquity and late antiquity belonged to a small privileged group of intellectual men who spent a considerable part of their lives in different academies or small learned societies. In these collectives the virtue of wisdom (Greek *sophia*, Latin *sapientia*) was the very foundation for consensus and cohesion. It is probably the significance of this solidarity that can explain why the Greek and Roman philosophers devoted so much thought to their attempts to explain the essence of friendship, since it was an important part of their self-image.

Friendship had a key role in ancient philosophy, where attaining true friendship was a path to the ultimate happiness, *summum bonum*.⁴ Friendship thus found a central place in Western philosophy because it helped to answer the basic question of philosophy: What is the meaning of life? It is therefore of the utmost importance to clarify life's meaningful bonds in response to certain questions. The philosophers asked, for example: What *is* friendship? Here they made a distinction between different types of friendship with different purposes. It was important to distinguish true friendship from false. Another problem was the origin of friendship. Where does it come from? Here the bond was given an existential, spiritual dimension which led to metaphysical reasoning where the answer could be found in the internal bond of the soul to the cosmos and the divine.

3 See also Eva Österberg's study of the classical discourse of friendship, E. Österberg, 2007, pp. 49–69; also Claudia Garnier, 2000, pp. 3–8; Klaus Oschema, 2006b, pp. 117–129, and Barbara H. Rosenwein, 2016, pp. 16–34.

4 R. Hyatte, 1994, p. 2.

Philosophers also dwelt on the significance of friendship for the individual. A true friend could see in his partner an alter ego, a mirror image of his own virtue, and hence the bond was a source of self-knowledge.⁵ Yet the discussions did not only concern friendship between two persons, but also friendship within small collectives such as learned fraternities. Ties of friendship were also given a broader societal dimension because they were viewed as a cohesive force in the citizen-state in that the bonds functioned as a cement, guaranteeing peace and harmony.

This friendship was thus a theoretical ideal image according to which the individual, through his emotions and his own intellectual ability, aspired for altruistic reasons to achieve true friendship. This bond was established through a free choice, in stark contrast to other personal liaisons in society, such as the kindred, the household, citizenship, and ethnic and commercial ties. Several thinkers also drew a dividing line between the true friendship of souls and the pragmatic friendship associated with self-interest, where interaction between the parties was based on a crass system of services and obligations. To gain deeper insight into what the thinkers of the time meant by the term friendship, we must briefly examine its vocabulary.

2 The Terminology of Friendship

It is not possible to give a clear definition of what we mean by friendship today based on the Greek sources. The Greek word *philia* had a range of meanings. It was a term used to denote love, endearment, and affection in general, but it could also be given specific meanings such as an intimate relationship between two people not related by blood. Under the concept of *philia* Aristotle sorted all loving relations between people, irrespective of whether these were bonds of kinship, friendship, tribal affiliation, citizenship, or some other community. Aristotle was thus interested in many different varieties of *philia*.⁶

The meaning of the term *philia* has been interpreted differently in scholarship. Some think that when *philia* is used to denote friendship in the Greek sources it is primarily with reference to pragmatic friendship, in other words, a non-emotional reciprocal relationship associated with obligations and mutual favours.⁷ This friendship is thought to have been important as an instrument in political life, because political groups were held together through bonds of

⁵ R. Hyatte, 1994, p. 18.

⁶ D. Konstan, 1997, p. 67; E. Österberg, 2007, pp. 50 ff.; K. Oschema, 2006, pp. 117.

⁷ M. Heath, 1987, pp. 73–74.

friendship based on mutual support and loyalty.⁸ The term *philia* could also be used to express a peaceful or amicable relationship between states. Many scholars believe that *philia* in archaic epic poetry stands for a formal, non-emotional bond based on obligation rather than love. This view has been challenged, for instance by David Konstan, who says that the term *philos*, for example, in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, is mainly used as a positive adjective for emotional and trusting relations among heroes or their next of kin back in the homeland. Another word used in this material to designate a friend is *hetairos*, which had a kind of collegial or ethnic meaning, designating a companion, brother in arms, or member of the same tribe. Odysseus calls his crew comrades *hetairoi* while his nearest and dearest in Ithaca are described as *philoï*.⁹

Konstan is also critical of the notion that *philia* in the classical era (c. 500–300 BC) was primarily associated with pragmatic political friendship. He would instead refer relations between *philoï* chiefly to the private sphere. *Philos*, according to Konstan, represents a voluntarily established bond of friendship based on affection, mutual understanding, and goodwill, which in most cases excludes kinship or citizenship. He defines the bond in the classical period as:

The relationship between *philoï* is voluntary or achieved as opposed to an ascribed connection grounded in status such as common membership in a family or community. One is born into a family and a city, but one makes friends.¹⁰

Friendship, according to this definition, is thus not predetermined; it requires active measures on the part of the individuals involved.

The Romans, unlike the Greeks, had a specific word for friendship: *amicitia*. This term too had a broad range of meanings but it mostly concerned specific relations between friends (*amici*). The Latin term that comes closest to the broad Greek word *philia* is *amor* (love).¹¹ Cicero points out that the Latin word for friendship derives from the verb *amare* (to love), which shows the close

8 W.R. Connor, 1971, p. 41; H. Hutter, 1978, p. 25.

9 D. Konstan, 1997, pp. 31–32. A similar distinction is made in Latin. In ancient Rome terms such as *sodalis*, *familiaris*, *commiles*, or *contubernalis* were used to denote comrades or companions. The same applies to the medieval sources. Yet the distinction cannot be described as consistent, since *philos* and *hetairos* could overlap, as could Latin *amicus* and *sodalis* or *familiaris*.

10 D. Konstan, 1997, p. 55. A similar more general definition of friendship is used by anthropologists.

11 D. Konstan, 1997, p. 122.

relationship of the Latin friendship term to the concept of love, but primarily with reference to affectionate emotions between men.¹² Cicero also chooses to translate Aristotle's *philia* with *amicitia*. *Amicitia* often denoted a specific relationship between individuals. The concept also had a societal dimension, however, in that it was an ideal in the form of a link that bound people, cities, and states together.¹³ Several scholars would primarily associate the term with public life in Rome, where *amicus* mainly meant a political companion or ally. Cicero has thus been interpreted as representing a pragmatic view of *amicitia* where the word denoted a strong political alliance, which in turn meant power within the public sphere.¹⁴ Peter Brunt, however, claims that men who belonged to different political factions could still be private *amici*. *Amicitia*, according to Brunt, had a broad range of senses, one of which could refer to intimate emotional relations between men.¹⁵ A similar view is espoused by Barbara Gold, who thinks that the word *amicus* could be used for political allies as well as for private intimate relationships.¹⁶ David Konstan likewise believes that the Romans were well aware of the difference between private friendships and the more utilitarian ties of friendship in the public political sphere.¹⁷ Cicero explains *amicitia* as "an accord in all things, human and divine, conjoined with mutual goodwill and affection".¹⁸ He thus associates both intimate emotional bonds between people, along with political, religious, and philosophical dimensions, with the concept. A common denominator for the Latin term *amicitia* could be said to be a liaison voluntarily entered into, based on some form of mutual exchange.¹⁹

3 Friendship in Greek Philosophy

Pythagoras (c. 580–500 BC) was the first known philosopher to plead for an intellectual, spiritual form of friendship. He formed a religious brotherhood

12 Cicero, *Laelius*, 11. 8.

13 B.P. McGuire 1988, p. xxix. Medieval Latin used terms such as *familiaritas* or *sodalitas* for collectives, while *amicitia* was chiefly employed for individuals. B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. 164. *Amicitia*, however, was often used to denote peace agreements between realms as well.

14 R. Syme, 1939, p. 157.

15 P.A. Brunt, 1988 (1st ed. 1965), pp. 367, 381.

16 B. Gold, 1987, pp. 40, 71, 104.

17 D. Konstan, 1997, p. 128.

18 Cicero, *Laelius*, 1. 6.

19 This bond could be horizontal or vertical in character. A patron's clients, however, were often called *amici*. See p. 164.

that settled in southern Italy. The Pythagoreans claimed that man consisted of an immortal soul trapped in a mortal body. The universe or *cosmos* was a divine living being that represented eternity. The meaning of life consisted in the union of the soul with the *cosmos*. Man therefore had to redeem and purify his soul, but the way there was long, as Pythagoras believed that the soul, through transmigration, had to pass through several different bodies before reaching its final destination.²⁰ He associated the concept of *philia* with an intimate friendship based on love, affection, and selflessness. It was not just a matter of friendship in theory; the Pythagoreans constituted a close-knit fraternity where friendship was the very keystone in the idea of brotherhood. Pythagoras advocated a collective way of life in which *philia* was valued more highly than all other personal bonds such as kinship. Status and social origin were thus of no significance. *Philia* meant equality, and for Pythagoras friends should own everything in common.²¹

This idea of brotherhood would subsequently be of great significance for the academies and intellectual societies of classical and late antiquity. The basic features of Pythagorean philosophy and conduct are also reflected in the doctrines of the medieval monastic orders.²² Pythagoras's collectivist ideal also had a societal dimension in that he is said to have pleaded for the reform of the state. This was then significant for the development of political theory, as Plato derived inspiration from Pythagoras when he described his ideal republic.

Aristotle's (384–322 BC) work *The Nicomachean Ethics* (books 8 and 9) contains the most detailed philosophical treatment of *philia*. He provides guidance in ethics by clarifying which habits and characteristics should be regarded as virtues and encouraged in oneself and one's fellow men.²³ To achieve the greatest happiness, people should follow the path of virtue through their reason. This requires the proper character, which is something that must be developed through practice. The desirable virtues were, for example, wisdom, justice, moderation, generosity, and strength of mind.

20 FL, pp. 452–53.

21 J. McEvoy, 1999, p. 6.

22 See also the guild statutes, Chapter 4.

23 Eva Österberg has discussed the phenomenon of virtue in connection with the concepts of "life-view" and "life-attitude". Life-view here stands for e.g. theories about man's relation to the world and the cosmos and his basic norms and values. Life-attitudes represent something more concrete and geared to action, which can be associated with stances and specific behaviour. Thus the concept, according to Österberg, stands for "how a person related *in* life and *to* life with a certain permanence and consistency". This attitude is thus part of the individual's character. Friendship was considered by classical and medieval thinkers to be a way to self-knowledge, and the active practice of "true friendship" can therefore be regarded as a life-attitude. E. Österberg, 2008, pp. 51 f.

Aristotle's *philia* included all types of intimate emotional bonds between people, whether friends, relatives, or citizens. He examined several variations on this theme, one type of *philia* being the love that arose between *philoï*/friends. These bonds were regarded as separate from public life and thus were not a political instrument.²⁴ Aristotle distinguished three types of friendship: one for pleasure and enjoyment, another utilitarian form mainly serving self-interest, where the bonds were intended to bring political advantage, and the ethically perfect friendship based on respect between virtuous people as a result of their mutual understanding.²⁵ It was this virtuous friendship that was considered true and perfect friendship, which gave life meaning in that it was the highest moral success a person could attain. Generosity and goodwill were the personality traits that laid the foundation for the friendship of the virtuous. Generosity and goodwill (*eunia*) were supposed to be based on total unselfishness, with the benevolent action itself affording pleasure to the giver. This goodwill was the sign of perfect friendship because the virtuous person really wished to benefit his friend for that friend's own sake.²⁶ Virtuous people were drawn to each other when they were each other's equals. Justice and friendship thus became closely related concepts through the idea of equality. Self-knowledge and self-love, according to Aristotle, were a precondition for friendship. Harmony and love for a friend rested exclusively on harmony and love for oneself. A true friend should be able to see in his partner a mirror image of his own virtue (*arete*), with the result that the friend himself became a source of self-knowledge.²⁷

The Swedish historian Eva Österberg has stressed how Aristotle views happiness as an "activity" of excellence or virtue. This activity could consist of both thoughts and social actions. In this connection Aristotle makes a distinction between wisdom (*sophia*) and prudence or practical wisdom (*phronesis*). Wisdom stands for individual insight gained through profound thinking, whereas prudence also includes practical action and deliberations in interaction with other people. Perfect friendship thus arises, according to Aristotle, between virtuous people who arrive at wise decisions in unison.²⁸

The way to the perfect friendship and hence the supreme happiness, however, was very long, since it was a time of protracted testing when the friends had to show proof of their firmness of character. The relationship was repeatedly subjected to trials of various kinds. If one of the parties could not manage the

24 D. Konstan, 1997, pp. 67 f.

25 C.S. Jaeger, 1999, p. 28.

26 E.G. Cassidy, 1999, p. 49.

27 R. Hyatte, 1994, p. 18; E.G. Cassidy, 1999, p. 50. The importance of self-knowledge was also emphasized by Socrates and Plato. J. McEvoy, 1999, p. 9.

28 E. Österberg, 2008, pp. 54 f.

tests, the other was obliged to end the liaison. Aristotle's ideal friendship process thus began with virtue and goodwill and was finally crowned with the perfect affinity, when the friend became a second self. The spiritual dimension in Aristotle's view of the essence of friendship, however, is not explicit, but only hinted at. Nor is he particularly concrete when it comes to the social functions of the bond, other than that friendship is thought "to keep cities together" and that it promotes justice, which means that the social community is strengthened.²⁹ The universal expansion of the spiritual and social role of the relationship, however, was something that would be considered by Aristotle's successors.

The Stoics occupied themselves with trying to explain the structure of the *cosmos* and presenting an ethics that gave guidance to people on how they could live in harmony with the cosmos. Full harmony could be attained by the wise man who succeeded in living in accord with reason and nature, which for the Stoics constituted a unity. The prime means to achieve this state was through virtues such as wisdom, courage, justice, and moderation.³⁰ The origin of friendship could be found in spiritual and divine unity. All human souls were a part of this cosmos, which meant that people were children of one father and thus were all brothers.³¹ Only the virtuous who had the ability to achieve a harmonious way of life possessed the true wisdom required to attain true friendship. These thoughts about the role of virtue were to be of great significance for the Roman thinkers, while simultaneously the spiritual and universal outlook on friendship was incorporated by the authors of the New Testament. The message preached there, that all Christian souls are brothers, has close similarities to the philosophy of Stoicism.³² The Stoics thus helped to give the relationship a major role in theology by providing it with soul and spirit. Friendship can thereby be said to have become a kind of essence in itself.

4 *Amicitia* in Roman Philosophy

Cicero (106–43 BC), in his works about epistemology, ethics, and politics, was the writer who brought Greek philosophy into the Latin world. Together with

29 E.G. Cassidy, 1999, p. 47; E. Österberg, 2008, p. 55; S. Votinius, 2004, pp. 68 ff.

30 FL, pp. 525–526. Stoicism is divided into three phases: Early Stoa (300–150 BC), founded in Athens by Zeno and Chrysippus; Middle Stoa under Hellenism; and Late Greco-Roman Stoa (50 BC–AD 200), including Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.

31 J. McEvoy, 1999, p. 12; E.G. Cassidy 1999, p. 52.

32 A central concept here among the Greek philosophers was *pneuma* (the breath of life), the substance of air and fire that created and maintained the universe. This primeval force is very similar to the Holy Spirit in Christian theology. FL, p. 435. There are also similarities to the Manichean "life-spirit".

Seneca (4 BC–AD 65) he was the bridge between the Stoics' universal view of friendship and the doctrines of friendship and love propounded by the church fathers of late antiquity. Cicero's most profound treatment of friendship is to be found in his text *Laelius de Amicitia* (44 BC).³³ This was one of most widely read classical works in the Middle Ages. It was partly via *De Amicitia* that medieval westerners before the latter half of the thirteenth century came into indirect contact with Aristotle's ideas of friendship and love. The source was frequently used as a handbook of friendship in both spiritual and temporal contexts.³⁴ *De Amicitia* has been called the best-loved book by a non-Christian author during this period. Cicero's views of friendship thus set their stamp on medieval theological dissertations and on political handbooks such as prince's mirrors and more theoretical works such as the writings of John of Salisbury.

De Amicitia was written with a didactic purpose, to serve as a practical guide for the republican senators. Using a series of *exempla*, Cicero illustrates righteous actions performed by long-dead Romans. These function as moral role models for today's decadent and corrupt politicians. In the turbulent period that was the end of the republic, it must have been of the utmost importance to be able to distinguish the "genuine" and "true" elite who deserved their political positions because of their individual inner quality. The work thus had a legitimizing function while the author simultaneously presented a model for noble political behaviour.

For Cicero friendship was not merely a philosophical concern discussed in small learned societies, but a phenomenon of major significance in the public political arena. Yet he cannot solely be regarded as an advocate of pragmatic friendship, with the term *amicus* standing for a party in a political alliance formed by people who combined for the mutual exchange of favours and interests. Cicero emphasized that friendship should not primarily be based on considerations of the practical utility of the relationship.³⁵ He pleaded for an ideal according to which political activity and private ties should be joined for the public good through agreement (*consensio*) between virtuous men.³⁶ *Amicitia* thus played an important role in society because this bond helped to create harmony in the state when virtue pervaded society. A factor of great significance if consensus between friends was to be translated into political action was mutual trust or *fides*.³⁷ Since no one could be personally present in

33 The text is a supplement to *De Officiis*.

34 C.S. Jaeger, 1999, p. 29; B.P. McGuire, 1988, pp. xxxiv–xxxvi.

35 E.G. Cassidy, 1999, p. 54.

36 B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. xxxvi.

37 D. Konstan, 1997, p. 130.

every political context, tasks had to be entrusted to friends. Whoever abused the trust of friendship risked the general good because friendship was a cornerstone in socio-political life. If *fides* is betrayed, everything falls. For Cicero, however, the fundamental bond of loyalty was fidelity to the *patria*, that is the Roman republic. This patriotic virtue outweighed all other loyalties.

Like Aristotle, then, Cicero talks of different forms of friendship. In the intimate personal friendship expressed in his letters to close friends he describes the spiritual affinity (*animus*) that unites them, even though they are separated by long distances.³⁸ He also refers, however, to a more universal friendship that includes the whole of humanity in keeping with Stoic thought.³⁹ All these different forms of friendship in Cicero recur in the medieval sources. For the Christian authors, however, the most fundamental bond of Ciceronian loyalty, devotion to the *patria*, is replaced with submission to God or the Kingdom of God which for medieval theologians often was synonymous with the *patria*.

Cicero adopted several of Aristotle's thoughts about *philia* but recast them in a Romanized form of friendship and love. As in the case of Aristotle, *eunia* is genuine goodwill, *benevolentia*, a sign of true friendship. In other words, you wish your friend well for his own sake, with no ulterior self-interest. Cicero's *amicitia*, as with Aristotle, exists only between virtuous men who are attracted to each other as a result of resembling each other, for instance sharing a love of goodness. For Cicero, *benevolentia* grows as a result of a long process, while in Aristotle this property is the start of a friendship. For Cicero and the Stoics, it is instead agreement that is the origin of friendship.⁴⁰ He thus explains the essence of friendship as "accord (*consensio*) conjoined with goodwill (*benevolentia*) and affection (*caritas*) in all things, human and divine".⁴¹ What makes Cicero different from his Greek predecessor is that he presents, as it were, a law of friendship (*codex legum amicitiae*), which gives his theses an instructional character that was to be of great significance for medieval authors – especially in the twelfth century, which has been described as the century of friendship (see page 50). During that century there was also intensified learned discussion of the essence and origin of virtue.⁴² This discourse was present in both the secular courtly culture and the ecclesiastical sphere. In this connection Cicero's *De officiis* and its supplement *De Amicitia* were important as sources for the eternal classical truths about the supreme virtues.

38 D. Konstan, 1997, p. 125.

39 E.G. Cassidy, 1999, p. 54.

40 E.G. Cassidy, 1999, p. 53.

41 Cicero, *Laelius*, I. 6.

42 K. Johannesson, 1978, p. 35.

For Cicero, as for Aristotle, friendship and virtue, *amicitia* and *virtus* – *philia* and *arete*, are intimately associated with each other.⁴³ It was the wish of nature that the wise and the virtuous should unite since they were each other's image as twin souls. They could thereby draw up a contract of friendship (*foedus*) predicated on the fact that each loved his partner as himself. The wise (*sapientes*) embodied eternal virtues such as forethought, moderation, courage, loyalty and generosity. They had to rival each other in virtuous conduct by encouraging each other to great deeds. For Cicero this entailed a serious social responsibility in that their inner qualities obliged them to take an active part in politics and make the right decisions. Friendship and virtue were thus the very emblem of the republic's governing elite. Another characteristic of a perfect friendship, *amicitia perfecta*, was that a true friend had to be candid to his partner and chastise him if he deviated from the path of virtue. This frankness distinguished a true friend from a flatterer or charlatan.⁴⁴

The picture that emerges of Cicero's ideal of friendship shows that it is not possible to make any distinction between a pragmatic type of friendship and a spiritual friendship, since one type is a condition for the other. Friendship rests on virtue. The friends give and take practical benefits. This fruitful interaction thus acts for the public good in a broader perspective.

Several authors in the Greco-Roman cultural sphere discussed the characteristics of true friendship (*vera amicitia*). Plutarch (AD 45–120), like Cicero and various Hellenistic thinkers such as Isocrates, Themistius, and Philodemus the Epicurean, emphasized frankness (Greek *parrhesia*, Latin *libertas*) as a distinctive feature of genuine friendship.⁴⁵ Its opposite was the false friend or flatterer who praises everything you do, while the true friend does not accept it when you do wrong and instead dares to speak out. The opposite of this outspokenness was fawning (Greek *kolakeiai*). This discourse was of great significance in political contexts because frankness was considered the prime virtue of a counsellor. Dio Chrysostom (AD 40–120), in a panegyric to Emperor Trajan, warns of the danger of surrounding oneself with flatterers. Instead he hails true friends as a ruler's most valuable and surest assets. These were "better than walls and armies".⁴⁶ The prince's need for advisors who spoke the truth

43 This also applies to Plato, who viewed friendship as an endeavour to find virtue. B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. xxxii.

44 D. Konstan, 1997, p. 12.

45 *Parrhesia*, however, did not necessarily stand for frankness but could also represent the essential condition of democracy: the right of all citizens to speak freely.

46 D. Konstan, 1997, p. 107. On the friend and the flatterer, see D. Konstan, 1996, pp. 7–19; in Plutarch, see T. Engberg-Pedersen, 1996, pp. 61–82. In Philodemus, see C.E. Glad, 1996, pp. 21–60. In the New Testament see D.E. Fredrickson, 1996, pp. 163–184.

and were simultaneously their close friends is a classical theme that recurs in medieval prince's mirrors and writings on political theory. We see this all the way from Alcuin and the Carolingian renaissance, via the twelfth-century renaissance as represented by John of Salisbury and Saxo Grammaticus, down to Dante's *Convivio* and Machiavelli's *Il Principe*.

The major role ascribed to trust was developed by Valerius Maximus, who claimed around AD 31 that true friendship was stronger than kinship ties and that a friend only proves to be genuine in difficult situations when friendship was tested. Another fundamental ethical property for a friend, according to the author, was self-effacing loyalty, *devotio*, where the parties were prepared to defend or die for each other.⁴⁷ This heroic ideal of friendship, where *fides* is the noblest of virtues, was then adopted by medieval courtly literature. Valerius Maximus, however, does not view *amicitia* solely as a relationship between people who were equal in status. This bond also characterized asymmetrical ties such as patron-client relations or the wise master and his protégé.⁴⁸

A characteristic feature of the ancient philosophers' theories of love and friendship was that they proceeded from the individual's mental life when they discussed how a person should relate to fellow human beings. The emotional and social interaction in question was primarily relations between two individuals or within small collectives. True friendship was an ethical principle for social interaction, but simultaneously served spiritual purposes since it pointed the way towards the highest personal happiness. When these theories were interpreted in a Christian context, the theologians seized on the spiritual aspects concerning the affinity of souls, but moved the focus from the individual and small groups to a much broader community. Friendship thus became not merely an instrument for achieving supreme individual happiness, but also a divine companion for the salvation of all mankind.

5 Friendship in the Apocalyptic Era

For the earliest Christian theologians writing in different parts of the disintegrating Roman Empire and the Near East, the Greco-Roman philosophers' theories of friendship played a crucial part in shaping the Christian doctrine of love. Through selective quotation from classical thinkers they sought to combine this pagan thought with the image of love and friendship conveyed by the

47 R. Hyatte, 1994, p. 34.

48 R. Hyatte, 1994, p. 36. Horace, however, warned of the heavy obligations of vertical friendship. See Chapter 4.

Bible. These bonds, according to the church fathers, were the links to God and the kingdom of heaven.

The Old Testament describes Moses and Abraham as God's *philoï* and in the New Testament Jesus calls the disciples his friends. In the Bible friendship between people was also viewed as an expression of divine presence here on earth. The friendship between David and Jonathan, for example, was an ideal friendship which served as a model for a spiritual way of life.⁴⁹ It is of course difficult to say to what extent the authors of the Bible were affected by Greco-Roman philosophy, but clear influences can be seen in the New Testament. An example is Luke the evangelist, who was part of the late Hellenistic intellectual milieu. He talks of Christians as being united by being of one heart and one soul and thus having all things in common.⁵⁰ Luke applied here a classical Greek metaphor for the affinity between friends.

Church fathers like Ambrose (c. 339–397), Augustine (c. 354–430), and Jerome (c. 347–420) had been educated at classical schools in the heart of the Roman Empire and subsequently worked at different places inside and outside the Empire. There they strove to establish Christian communities that functioned as oases in a still mostly pagan world. For these theologians who chose to live in celibacy, the ascetic friendship between the men in the Christian collectives was of the greatest value. The church fathers, however, also communicated by letter with faraway friends. These letters reveal a spiritual friendship not separated by distances in time or space.

During the turbulent time in which the church fathers lived, the need for cooperation between Christian believers must have been very great. The Christian thinkers were threatened from several quarters; on the intellectual plane by pagan philosophers and non-orthodox "heretics" such as Arians and Manichaeans; on a more concrete level by local political rulers and barbarian princes who were penetrating deeper and deeper into the Roman Empire with their huge armies. In this apocalyptic era the idea developed of a larger collective Christian community where all the believers were united in spirit by being the children of God and thus being brothers. The most important element cementing this unity was the love of God and the friendship of Christ. Church fathers like Augustine created a vision of a completely new ideal Christian society which would replace the collapsing Roman social structure.⁵¹ These

49 C. Morris, 1991 (1st ed. 1972), p. 98. This also demonstrates the significance of friendship in the Jewish tradition.

50 J. McEvoy, 1999, p. 8.

51 Christianity as a religion can be said, in intellectual terms, to have been founded by Paul. During the profound crisis that set its stamp on the era of the church fathers it developed into a societal ideology.

thinkers had a powerful religious conviction as they formed an intellectual order of battle to defend true Christianity and to spread its teachings. There was thus an urgent need for a shared collective identity, resting on a uniform foundation of values.

The early Christian theologians, however, had an ambivalent attitude to the Greco-Roman philosophy of friendship.⁵² Some rejected these pagan thinkers out of hand, while others tried to reconcile their theories with a new Christian ideology.

6 From Classical Philosophy to the Christian Theology of Late Antiquity

The church fathers were forced to confront the problem of how to combine the Greco-Roman perception of *philia/amicitia*, which was primarily associated with an intimate, loving relationship between two or more people, with the Christian message of universal love comprising all of humanity. The Stoics' theories of the divine origin of friendship in Nature, and of all men being brothers by virtue of being children of one father, with each soul a part of "the eternal fire", was incorporated via Cicero and Seneca into early Christian theology.⁵³ Cicero's view of friendship as a spiritual understanding, characterized by mutual goodwill and love, was adopted by several Christian writers. For Augustine's master Ambrose, the motif of *benevolentia*, wishing the other well for his own sake, was a central element in bridging the gap between the ancient view of friendship and the all-embracing Christian friendship. In his version, however, it was goodwill towards all fellow believers. In this connection Ambrose was closer to Aristotle than to Cicero in that he saw goodwill as a first step towards friendship since that was what brought virtuous people together.⁵⁴

The view of friendship was nevertheless highly ambivalent among the Christian theologians. The eastern Christian thinkers, known as the desert fathers,

52 For a more detailed study of Augustine's view of friendship, see E. Österberg, 2007, pp. 106–120. Österberg discusses how Augustine warns of the dangers of friendship as this bond can lead to the creation of an "us and them" mentality, and comradeship entails a risk that the individual abandons his individual moral responsibility. In contrast to this "evil friendship" Augustine presented the true friendship emanating from God. E. Österberg, 2007, pp. 111 ff. See also Barbara H. Rosenwein, 2016, pp. 24–34.

53 J. McEvoy, 1999, p. 20.

54 E.G. Cassidy, 1999, pp. 45, 59. According to Cicero, it was consensus that initiated friendship.

tended to reject friendship. They were hermits who endeavoured to come close to God through solitude and contemplation. The desert fathers represented an ascetic ideal (*apatheia*) according to which all human emotions were subordinate to the divine and thus unimportant. Instead one should concentrate all one's power on reaching God, which meant that friendship for other people was a deviation from the correct path.⁵⁵ Among the western church fathers there was likewise a suspicion of ties of friendship between a few individuals, which was regarded as the counter of the universal doctrine of Christian love. This outlook then influenced the monastic movement in the Early Middle Ages. The Benedictines, for example, warned against admitting secular loyalties to the monastic world. Ties of kinship and relations of friendship between individuals were perceived as a threat to the spiritual brotherhood within the walls of the monastery.⁵⁶ These secular bonds were associated with the feuding society and were thus a menace to peace.

The New Testament preached a generous collective impersonal ideal of friendship, *agapē*, love of one's neighbour, irrespective of whether he was evil or good.⁵⁷ The church fathers took this message and used it to create the vision of the new society, united through the Christian community. This in turn led to the use of another terminology where words like *agapē*, *caritas*, and *dilectio* – associated with universal love – were preferred to more friendship-related terms such as *philia* and *amicitia*. They wished to portray themselves first and foremost as brothers united in Christ through their faith, rather than being friends because of their virtuous inner qualities.⁵⁸ The church fathers thereby valued the collective more highly than the individual. The collective ideal of friendship played an important part in the foundation of an all-embracing societal ideology, but it was also a result of the context in which the Christian thinkers lived.⁵⁹ They were active in small Christian communities where the need for cohesion and loyalty was of the utmost importance if they were to survive. These groups could create a local anchorage and identity through the cult of a saint, while simultaneously communicating by letter over large distances with like-minded groups all over the Empire. Ambrose appealed to

55 B.P. McGuire, 2007, pp. 21 ff.

56 B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. 84. On the view of ties of loyalty between monastic brothers, see S. Vanderputten, 2015, pp. 279–303; B.P. McGuire, 2015, pp. 305–326.

57 Compare this outlook with Aristotle's and Cicero's interpretation of friendship and virtue. Here the friendship relation was based on loving one's partner as oneself by being each other's image in virtue. See p. 26, 30.

58 D. Konstan, 1997, p. 161.

59 Augustine came into contact with Neoplatonism during his time in Milan, and it was also during this period that he turned to Christianity.

these collectives of brethren as his friends and sons.⁶⁰ This Christian group culture and its collective ideal of friendship would then become a natural part of medieval society, not just within the monastic movement but also in other socio-religious associations such as guilds, prayer communities, or military brotherhoods. These groups were given designations such as *societas*, *communitas*, or *fraternitas* and were imbued with a sacred loyalty which could not be broken because it was sworn before God.⁶¹

Within the universal Christian community, the link uniting the smaller collectives and the individual believers was thus love of God. At the centre of the Christian theory of friendship was Jesus. According to the Bible, he had sacrificed his life for his friends, and Jesus then chose, after his resurrection, to call the disciples his friends instead of servants. For believers it was possible to achieve friendship with Christ. Because he was a part of the Trinity, this also meant friendship with God.⁶² Important mediators of Christ's love were the angels and the saints. Paulinus of Nola (c. 354–431) expressed this perception of faith when he wrote that one could worship a saint as an invisible friend.⁶³ This meant that one could have friends both among mortals on earth and among the immortals on the other side. Friendship in earthly life between Christians was viewed as a foretaste of heaven. If people were friends with Christ, the angels, and the saints, they were also each other's friends. Those who were enemies of Christ or the saints were also enemies of the believers – *amici* versus *inimici*. This struggle between good and evil was of course highly relevant in the days of the church fathers, but it was also a constantly recurrent theme in the medieval sources. Historical and contemporary conflicts were interpreted in accordance with this eternal contest. Logic was actively employed in medieval theological rhetoric, not infrequently used for political purposes, and the adversary (who could be either pagan or Christian) could be portrayed as an enemy of the saints and thus an antagonist of God and a henchman of Satan.

The Christian doctrine of love and friendship meant another view of the individual and his relationship to his neighbour. Christian thinkers emphasized their own unworthiness and belittled the self, because all ordinary mortals were regarded as mere sinners. According to Augustine, the noble virtues could not derive from the individual's own person but must come from God acting through people. Classical philosophers like Aristotle and Cicero had claimed that a person deserving of the epithet "true friend" earned it for his

60 D. Konstan, 1997, p. 152.

61 See Chapter 4.

62 J. McEvoy, 1999, p. 30.

63 B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. 77.

inner qualities. According to Paulinus of Nola, such a statement was a sign of arrogance and pride (*superbia*) which could be associated with the classical deadly sins.⁶⁴ These thinkers thus represented the attitude that people should not think they were special, but should take their place in the Christian hierarchy where all were sinners in the sight of God. Theologians like Ambrose, Paulinus, and Gregory the Great instead promoted new Christian cardinal virtues such as piety, humility, and mercy. According to Ambrose, it was chiefly such virtues that brought true friends together. These virtues would then serve as a model for the medieval princely ideal and the God-fearing member of society. Since the church fathers did not place such emphasis on friendship between individuals, stressing instead the love and friendship that brought all the souls of Christianity together, the Christian ideology of friendship became an element in the constitution of society. This also meant that true Christian friendship was not reserved for the elite of society, as was the case with Aristotle and Cicero, but comprised all social groups in Christendom.

When it comes to the view of friendship between the sexes, the church fathers conveyed an ambivalent picture. The majority of them lived in a world consisting solely of men. In Augustine's world men existed for friendship, women for sex. Friendship was a good thing. Sex and physical love were associated with sin.⁶⁵ Among women, only virgins and to some extent widows could represent the true Christian virtues. Jerome, on the other hand, addressed several letters to chaste women and also surrounded himself with a group of close female friends. He praised the high morals and profound intellect of these women. Yet Jerome is also known for a number of disparaging comments about women, but these statements concern woman as a social sexual being.⁶⁶ He used friendship terminology to almost the same extent in communication with ascetic women as with men. According to the Christian view, the soul was sexless, and woman and man were therefore equal in the face of salvation. Jerome believed that friendship could exist between women and men provided that the men acted as spiritual guides to the women.⁶⁷

At the transition from late antiquity to the medieval period we can discern a change in the rhetoric of friendship and love in that it was also used in connection with vertical social relations. Venantius Fortunatus (c. 530–600) was an Italian poet who composed panegyrics to princes and church dignitaries in the Merovingian and Gallo-Roman elite. The poems served a pragmatic purpose as

64 D. Konstan, 1997, p. 159.

65 B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. 41; C.S. Jaeger, 1999, pp. 13 ff., 25 f.

66 N. Damsholt, 1985, pp. 67 f.; S. Bagge, 1992, pp. 244 f.

67 B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. 64.

he was endeavouring to establish fruitful patron-client relations which could benefit his career. Fortunatus used a vocabulary in which he combined the rhetoric of love (*amor, caritas*) with that of friendship (*amicitia*).

The pragmatic aspect of these praise poems lies in the fact that they can be interpreted as a form of negotiation between a client and a potential patron.⁶⁸ Fortunatus' emotionally charged language, in which there is no clear dividing line between love and friendship, must have been a successful method since he crowned his career by becoming bishop of Poitiers. Within the framework of these panegyrics there was also room for spiritual friendship, but in this context associated with a sacralization of the princely power.⁶⁹ Later in the Middle Ages this genre which praised vertical bonds based on friendship and love would be of great significance in princely rhetoric and the social field comprising patron-client relations.

7 Summing Up

The roots of ideological friendship can thus be found in ancient Greece and Rome. This ideology served the purpose of creating meaning, models, and norms in social life. It was used both as a guiding principle for the individual's personal development and as a normative complex of ideas about how the good society was to be realized. In contrast to Hobbes, the ancient thinkers proceeded from the individual's internal capacity for social interaction. Aristotle laid the foundation for a humanistic outlook where friendship was an educational ideal. By following the path of virtue, an individual could attain the supreme happiness. This goal was achieved through mutual understanding between friends. The virtuous man's altruistic love for his fellow humans laid the foundation for the idea of equality. Friendship thus paved the way, not just to self-knowledge but also to harmonious social organization. Aristotle, however, represented an elitist ideal, primarily associated with a group culture consisting of small intellectual fraternities.

The Stoics developed the idea of spiritual friendship in which human souls were connected to a divine unity, and therefore all men in theory were to be regarded as brothers. But it was only the virtuous who could achieve true friendship in practice. The Roman thinkers set friendship in a broader societal context where the bond represented not merely an ethical ideal for small

68 L. Livorsi, 2016, p. 23.

69 L. Livorsi, 2016, pp. 26–27. According to Livorsi, this type of panegyric poems had its predecessor in Roman praise poems performed by poets such as Ovid.

intellectual societies. In Cicero's philosophy friendship played a prominent role on the public political stage. Consensus between virtuous men could best serve the public good. Trust between friends, *fides*, was the cornerstone of all political collaboration seeking to create harmony within the Roman state. Cicero's ideology can be associated with the legitimization of power and social identity in that he pleaded that the republic ought to be governed by a group of senators who were equals in virtue and justice. He represents not just a pragmatic outlook on friendship but also stresses the spiritual affinity of the virtuous, while simultaneously alluding to a more universal friendship comprising the whole of humanity.

For the church fathers of late antiquity, friendship was the bond that would bring about the vision of the good society where the celestial City of God served as the model. For the individual, friendship was the link to God and the idea of brotherhood united the human collective in a joint effort to achieve divine order on earth. This friendship was thus not only associated with the elite of society but with the whole of humanity. The ideology had an identity-creating function in that the church fathers established a foundation of norms and values around which Christians united during the dramatic transformation of society in late antiquity. At the same time they laid the foundation for an ideology which would be of great significance during the Middle Ages for the social formation process of clerical groups. The church fathers' ideas of a holy social order based on love and friendship could also be used to legitimize power. In the earliest medieval sources this ideology was employed by different princes and magnates in their endeavours to justify their dominant roles in society.⁷⁰ They legitimized their prominent position with the claim that this harmonized with a sacral hierarchical order. The elite had obtained their power from God, but in return for this they were obliged to rule in accordance with the message of friendship and love. This hierarchical ideology could simultaneously be used by subordinates as a tool to establish fruitful patron-client relations.

Yet it was chiefly during the upheavals of the eleventh and twelfth centuries that the classical ideology of friendship had its great renaissance. This was partly a consequence of the fact that it was during these centuries that written culture had its definitive breakthrough in Europe. At the new universities and cathedral schools the old classical and Christian authors were studied. These masters served as models when it came to ancient wisdom about ethics,

⁷⁰ This legitimization technique where emotions, norms, and values are steered in a particular direction could be compared with William M. Reddy's concept of "emotional regimes", see W.M. Reddy, 2001, p. 129.

human behaviour, and social order. Ideas deriving both from pagan philosophers like Cicero and Christian thinkers of late antiquity were frequently used by learned groups in their ambitions to interpret and legitimize the new social order of the High Middle Ages. It was thus primarily the political and social changes in this newborn Europe that lay behind the renaissance of the ancient virtues of friendship. The medieval sources have a strong ideological colouring, and if we are to understand them at a deeper level we must also be familiar with the ancient way of thinking from which the ideas originated. In these sources the discourse of friendship served three purposes above all: (1) spirituality and self-knowledge; (2) collective identity creation and social formation; (3) legitimation of political order and lordship.

The focus on friendship and love as unifying elements in society during times of upheaval has several historical parallels. Cicero was active during the violent final days of the Roman Republic, when it was vital to establish internal cohesion against the enemies of the republic. Augustine wrote his works during a turbulent period when the Roman Empire was moving towards its fall. In this context there was a need to legitimize not only the new Christian state order but also its intellectual predecessors. The praise of friendship during the eleventh and twelfth centuries can be associated with the progress of the reform movement and the transformation of the social structure. Cicero's endeavour to single out a true elite who enjoyed their prominent position on account of the members' internal quality can also be found among the ruling stratum of the High Middle Ages. Augustine's visions of the Christian order of society were simultaneously used in crusading propaganda, as a fanatical defence of the struggle of Catholic Christianity against the infidels.⁷¹

The Christian philosophers of late antiquity quoted selectively from the Greco-Roman theories of friendship and adapted them to their own purposes, while simultaneously adding new ideals. Yet it was not only their outlook on friendship that was passed on in medieval culture. During the Carolingian renaissance, the twelfth-century renaissance, and the scholasticism of the thirteenth century, medieval intellectuals also derived inspiration direct from the Greco-Roman ideals of friendship without taking the route through Christian filters. Stephen Jaeger claims that there were two ideals of friendship and love during the Middle Ages: a collective Christian and social obligation (*caritas*)

⁷¹ Wojtek Jezierski has shown, for example, how missionaries in the border lands between the Christians and the pagan Slavs constructed emotional boundaries between "us" and "them", mainly based on fear of "the Other". This fear was used as an instrument to create internal solidarity and community in the Christian enclaves. Wojtek Jezierski, 2016, pp. 155–190.

intended to create harmony in society; and a Greco-Roman elitist ideal that emphasized the eternal virtues. This friendship was reserved for a small group of charismatic men, whose inner qualities legitimized their leading position in society. Friendship functioned as a social marker, just as had been the case with Cicero's noble republican senators.⁷²

We should thus be aware of these two ideals when we turn to discuss the function of friendship ties in the written culture of the High Middle Ages. In this intellectual field the ideals were not merely utilized for spiritual and moral purposes. The terminology of friendship was clad in classical and Christian garb, but it was also used strategically, employing the ideological meaning of the terms for pragmatic purposes. Here the ideals chiefly had the function of legitimizing power. We therefore cannot make a sharp dividing line between pragmatic friendship and spiritual friendship. No such distinction can be made in Cicero's ideal of friendship, since one type, in theory, was the precondition for the other, and vice versa. The question is, to what extent does this also apply to high medieval culture? The problem will be examined in the next chapter through a study of the role of the friendship discourse in the process of social formation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The main question concerns how the ecclesiastical elite and the secular aristocracy used friendship to legitimize their positions in society and in the intellectual field.⁷³

72 C.S. Jaeger, 1999, pp. 31–32. Jaeger, and for that matter McGuire too, points out that the Ciceronian ideal of elitist friendship was not specific for the secular aristocracy; it was also widespread in the monastic movement. B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. 40. W.J. Brandt writes that medieval historiography can be divided into two categories ("modes of perception"): a spiritual way of interpreting historical events and a secular, aristocratic mode. The first tradition explains events and actions as a result of people's innate properties. Change is viewed as something negative associated with errors and accidents. Aristocratic historiography aims instead to praise rather than explain, by extolling great men and their deeds. Actions rather than inner properties are in focus. W.J. Brandt, 1966, cited in S. Bagge, 1998, pp. 37 f.

73 For the outlook on friendship and the use of its terminology in political contexts in the Migration and Merovingian periods, see v. Epp, 1999.

Friendship and Social Formation in the High Middle Ages

1 Centuries of Upheaval

The Middle Ages in Europe is generally reckoned as the period c. 500–1400. Here, however, I have chosen to study the time from the end of the tenth century to the start of the thirteenth century, with particular emphasis on the twelfth century. The justification for this demarcation is that the era differs so markedly from the preceding centuries. It therefore seems odd that historians today still use a periodization invented in the seventeenth century. In the early modern age, the nine hundred years of the Middle Ages were regarded as a long phase of stagnation between the culturally sophisticated antiquity and the new sophistication of modernity.¹

At the end of the tenth century, however, a process of change began which would fundamentally reshape European society. Today some historians use the term “revolution” to underline the dramatic transformation,² but this designation risks being drained of meaning as scholars tend to emphasize different revolutions as being particularly significant. In these contexts, for example, they speak of “the agrarian revolution”, “the urban revolution”, “the social revolution”, or “the written intellectual revolution”.³

In this book the focus will be on the latter two changes. A prominent role is also played here by a specific chronological concept, *the twelfth-century renaissance*. The term was launched in 1927 by the American historian Charles Homer Haskins, who criticized the established view that the cultural rebirth of antiquity began in northern Italy in the fifteenth century.⁴ He claimed that the true renaissance actually started in the intellectual milieu that arose at the universities and cathedral schools of northern France in the twelfth century. Today several scholars support Haskins’ thesis. Robert I. Moore, for example, declares that the notion of European civilization as a direct heir of classical

1 In the nineteenth century yet another periodization arose when cultural historians like Jules Michelet and Jacob Burckhardt introduced the concept of the Renaissance, chiefly associated with southern Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

2 G. Duby, 1980 (1st ed. 1978); G. Bois, 1992 (1st ed. 1989); R. Bartlett, 1994; T.N. Bisson, 1995.

3 R.I. Moore, 2000, pp. 1 ff.; T. Lindkvist, 2005, pp. 125 ff.

4 C.H. Haskins, 1927; P. Hermann, 2002, pp. 7 f.; T. Lindkvist, 2005.

culture was a construction that arose in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.⁵ There are several different reasons why the classical intellectual “heritage” came into use in this period.

If we go back to discussing the concept of “revolution” in connection with the explanations of social change, some historians primarily invoke economic causes. The agrarian revolution refers to the transition from a plunder economy to a feudal economy based on large estates and family farms, which served as the basis for systematic appropriation of the agricultural surplus.⁶ This provided the conditions for the growth of a landowning aristocracy.⁷ Parallel to this, there was also an urban revolution owing to the rise of large villages and towns, phenomena which had scarcely existed in Carolingian northern and western Europe.

One consequence of this development was the social revolution, which resulted in the rise, not only of a nobility but also of burghers as a separate group in society. Perhaps the most distinctive structural transformation, however, was that there also arose a new clerical aristocracy whose position was sustained by a literate, administrative, and judicial revolution.⁸ Robert I. Moore believes that this group stood out as the chief winners of the transformation by virtue of being the power elite of “the new Europe”.⁹ He argues the thesis that development in the eleventh and twelfth centuries led to the emergence of Europe, and thus instead of discussing a series of different revolutions he proposes the umbrella term “The First European Revolution”.¹⁰

There was undoubtedly a fundamental process of change during this period. What is of particular interest for this study is that the two ruling groups in

5 R.I. Moore, 2000, p. 1.

6 T. Lindkvist, 2005, p. 128.

7 Richard W. Southern, for example, used the expression “secret revolution” when he traced the slow emergence of the chivalrous caste from the eleventh to the twelfth century. R.W. Southern, 1951, p. 13.

8 A parallel to this can be found in China under the Northern Song dynasty. As in Europe, the period from the mid tenth century to the twelfth century saw the emergence of a new well-educated elite who based their position on the holding of offices in the growing bureaucratic apparatus.

9 R.I. Moore, 2000, p. 6.

10 R.I. Moore, 2000, p. 3. The view of societal processes as following evolutionary patterns where changes take place through leaps, “mutations”, or revolutions has been criticized by several scholars. See the debate in *Past & Present*, no. 142 (1994), pp. 6–42; no. 152 (1996), pp. 196–223; no. 155 (1997), pp. 177–225, and Chapter 4 in this book. I myself am not a keen supporter of these views, but I agree with Moore’s observation that it was in the eleventh and the twelfth century that the perception of Europe as the heir to classical culture was grounded.

the new society – the secular aristocracy and the ecclesiastical elite – justified their positions using ideological arguments borrowed from the classical world. High medieval elites transferred these ideals to new contexts and adapted them to their specific purposes, and therefore it is warranted to view them as creators of a renaissance culture. A formalized distinction arose not just between the secular and the clerical aristocracy but also between this stratum and the other members of society.¹¹

Moore elucidates this development by referring to Ernest Gellner's distinction between the social structure of Carolingian society – which is described in contemporary sources as consisting of two groups: *potentes* and *pauperes* (the powerful and the poor) – and the way authors in the High Middle Ages divided society into groups of *oratores*, *bellatores*, and *laboratores* (those who pray, those who fight, and those who work).¹² The reason the Early Middle Ages will not be considered to any extent in this study is that I want to shed light on the role of friendship in this process of change.

2 Different Friendship Discourses?

The classical ideals of friendship were maintained and transformed during the Middle Ages by learned men (*literati*) who could mainly be found in two settings: the aristocratic courts and the ecclesiastical institutions represented by the monasteries and the secular church. Some historians think that this also entailed the development of two different ideals of friendship.¹³ In the secular sphere the Ciceronian ideal of love and friendship had been established during the Carolingian renaissance and was then continuously elaborated in courtly culture.¹⁴ There seems however to be relative consensus that the spiritual ideology of friendship mainly flourished in the twelfth century. One explanation suggested for this is that it was a consequence of the reform movement, generating a new clerical intellectual elite, known as *clerici*, who used these

¹¹ T. Lindkvist, 2005, p. 130.

¹² R.I. Moore, 2000, p. 189. The tripartite society is mentioned for the first time at the end of the ninth century in King Alfred's England. O.G. Oexle, 1978, p. 13.

¹³ On the development of a clerical and a secular genre regarding love and friendship see C. Morris, 1991 (1st ed. 1972), p. 97. For a critique of this view see e.g. J.M. Ziolkowski, 1995, pp. 61 ff.

¹⁴ Stephen Jaeger has criticized the view that the praise of love and friendship in courtly lyric was a phenomenon chiefly associated with the eleventh and the twelfth centuries (see p. 72).

ideas to shape a social identity of their own. By combining classical learning and Christian theology they created an ideal of friendship that was able to unite the rapidly expanding group of clerics around a shared vision of society.¹⁵

The question is, however, to what extent we can divide the high medieval discourse of friendship into a secular and a ecclesiastical branch. Several scholars claim that no sharp separation can be made between the courtly culture and the ecclesiastical-monastic sphere. The majority of clerics were educated at the common seats of learning, such as cathedral schools, monasteries, and universities. The intellectuals of the aristocratic courts were often persons with a clerical background, and the leading authorities in the monastic world and the church not infrequently came from the secular aristocracy.¹⁶ Brian McGuire and Stephen Jaeger have discussed which of the two groups was the primary force behind the discourse of friendship in the period. McGuire has interpreted it chiefly as a monastic phenomenon, whereas Jaeger emphasizes the role of courtly culture. The outcome of the discussion is that both scholars have taken a step backwards, observing that it is not possible to make a clear distinction between a monastic and a secular courtly tradition.¹⁷ Instead they call for a broad study including both ecclesiastical and secular sources, in which the high medieval discourse of friendship is viewed as a general intellectual aristocratic phenomenon.¹⁸ The present study can therefore be regarded as a step in this direction.

During the twelfth century we can clearly distinguish an elitist discourse where certain groups in society resorted to intellectual means in order to justify their prominent positions. Here we shall look more closely at how the clerical elite and the secular aristocracy used the discourse of friendship in the process of social formation. Both these groups made use of classical ideals in combination with Christian ideas of friendship. Consequently we also must ask to what extent one can make a distinction between a secular pragmatic friendship and a spiritual emotional friendship.

15 J. Haseldine, 1994, 258 ff. The term cleric refers to a member of the privileged ecclesiastical estate as opposed to the laity. This umbrella term covers e.g. bishops, priests, and monks. On the Scandinavian intellectual elite's visions of society and their creation of social identity, see L. Hermanson, 2016, pp. 59–88.

16 The Cistercians played a prominent part in the twelfth-century cult of friendship. Several of the leading personalities in the order came from families belonging to the lower secular aristocracy. B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. 231.

17 B.P. McGuire, 2010, pp. lx–lxii.

18 C.S. Jaeger, 1994, p. 104.

3 The Ecclesiastical Elite

Early medieval society had thus been dominated by a free warrior caste (*potentes*) and a subordinate peasant population (*pauperes*). The church was subject to the temporal power, and the monasteries were only to a limited extent parts of an independent universal organization. The Gregorian reform movement of the eleventh century, however, led to a spiritual, social, political, and intellectual revolution. Alongside the traditional warrior elite, a new clerical aristocracy was formed, basing its position on offices in the swiftly growing ecclesiastical organization. In this context friendship played an important part in both pragmatic and ideological respects: pragmatically, in that ties of friendship were used for social advancement within the church hierarchy; ideologically, in that they actively employed classical and Christian ideals of friendship to create identity.

During the eleventh century the foundation was laid for the powerful Catholic church as an independent universal organization. The Gregorian reform preached the liberation of the church (*libertas ecclesiae*) from temporal power by realizing Augustine's thoughts about the ideal state, the City of God, *de civitate Dei*. An important element in the effort to achieve this new world order was the Cluny movement with its reform of the monastic system. The abbey of Cluny in Burgundy was founded in 910. What made its position different from that of other monastic houses was that the monks did not need to submit to any power whatever, whether the king, the lords, or the bishops. Cluny was particularly tied to the papacy and was obliged to obey no other ruler than the pope himself, the representative on earth of the kingdom of God.

Cluny became immensely significant for the high medieval church and served as a model for many monasteries. Sister abbeys of Cluny sprouted quickly elsewhere in Europe. New orders of monks and nuns were established, following strict moral rules, such as the Cluniacs, the Cistercians, the Carthusians, the Premonstratensians, and the Augustinians. The core of the reform programme was thus the liberation of the church from temporal power. First the reforms concerned changes within the monastic system with the intention to restore its moral reputation. This meant following the austere rules of St Benedict of Nursia, which required, for instance, that monks should live in absolute celibacy. The Investiture Controversy (c. 1075–1122), however, gave the reforms a general political meaning as the pope demanded a prohibition on simony (buying and selling church offices) and a ban on laymen granting investiture (appointment to high church offices).

During the twelfth century there was thus a vigorous expansion of the monastic system. Hundreds of new houses were founded in Europe in a short time. The Cistercian order soon attained a leading position in this development

thanks to its highly efficient centralized organization with close ties to the pope. At the same time, the administrative apparatus of the secular church was developed.¹⁹ In the wake of the Crusades there was active missionary work, which led to the establishment of new dioceses, above all in northern and eastern Europe. By the middle of the twelfth century the Catholic church had at its disposal a comprehensive institutional apparatus built up around monasteries and episcopal sees. This was an international organization extending over traditional regional and local boundaries, which meant that the forms in which information was transferred underwent a fundamental change. Writing now became the main instrument of communication, bridging the long distances separating the different units in the organization. The twelfth century was distinguished by a significant increase in the production of written texts, which in turn led to an intellectual revolution that brought opportunities for the literate, that is to say, those with a command of Latin, to create a new elite stratum.

A consequence of the increasing bureaucratization was a growing demand for educated officials. Different forms of educational institutions such as cathedral schools and monasteries therefore grew in importance. At these intellectual centres it was possible to study Latin by reading the available classical works. The church's rapidly growing stock of property also required administration and defence by judicial means, and therefore studies of Roman law occupied an increasing space at seats of learning. During the Investiture Controversy the clerical officials had succeeded in defending and strengthening their positions by asserting their rights vis-à-vis the temporal power. They thus acquired greater self-confidence as the bureaucratic field was increasingly monopolized by ecclesiastical men of learning.²⁰ The twelfth century saw the development of canon law, which meant that detailed rules stipulated the rights and obligations of clerics (and laymen), and how the ecclesiastical organization should be governed.

19 It is not possible to draw a sharp boundary between a secular and a monastic administrative organization since the clerical elite often worked in both the monastic organization and the secular church. In the middle of the twelfth century, for example, over fifty bishops, ten cardinals, and one pope had been chosen from among the Cistercians. The Augustinians, and to some extent the Cistercians as well, often served as advisors to princes and bishops. M.G. Newman, 1996, p. 2. On the role of the Augustinians in the secular public sphere see B. Ardura, 2015, pp. 327–344; L. Hermanson, 2016, pp. 59–88.

20 In Scandinavia the clergy in the early Middle Ages had a relatively low social status. The Norwegian law of Gulathing, *Gulatingslagen*, tells that the priests had previously been of unfree status but that they “now”, i.e., at the start of the twelfth century, had become respected members of society. The position of the bishops was also strengthened during this period. If a prince assaulted a bishop he could be banished.

3.1 *Collective Identity*

In daily life, however, the clerics and nuns were a minority who were screened off from the traditional social structure. When they made the decision to dedicate their lives to the spiritual path, they were also in many respects excluded from the local community. They could no longer count on the same support and help from the networks and patron relationships that characterized the village communities. The demand for celibacy in the reform movement meant that the monks and nuns could not create groups based on family relations and kinship interests. These secular loyalties were associated with the conflicts of the feud society, which could not be permitted to infringe the spiritual space.²¹ The church nevertheless actively supported kin solidarity in society. In the peace movement of the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, the church sought to strengthen family bonds within the aristocracy in order to prevent the constant feuds. It was believed that God had instituted marriage to create peace. Theologians such as Peter Damiani (1007–1072) developed Augustine's ideas that the amount of *caritas* in the world ought to be increased by marrying persons with whom one did not already have a "caritas relationship" through family ties. According to Damiani, increased kinship distance led to reduced family love and *discordia*, i.e. enmity.²² In Scandinavia too, the church sought to strengthen kin solidarity in order to create peace and spread *caritas*.²³ The God's Peace movement, with its promotion of friendship, can be regarded as part of the vision of increasing the amount of *caritas* in the world so that people would show each other mercy instead of using violence.

At the places of learning, however, the male theology students had found a spiritual and intellectual community. They were forced to leave this behind when they were appointed to offices or entered brotherhoods which were not infrequently located far away in the widespread area comprised by the Catholic organization. The monks could of course find like-minded individuals in the monastery, and those serving in the secular church had colleagues nearby, but they were still an intellectual minority in the local community where they worked. Here they had to try to cooperate with the local secular authorities, which could often result in conflicts of various kinds.

It was therefore extremely important to establish an identity that went beyond traditional regional and socio-political bonds. Churchmen sought the support and understanding of their peers to bridge the large distances with the aid of written communication. In medieval society, power and social interaction

21 B.P. McGuire, 1988, pp. 84 ff., 105.

22 L.I. Hansen, 2000, pp. 104 f.

23 M.H. Gelting, 2000, pp. 149 ff.

rested primarily on personal alliances which were renegotiated and kept alive through constant meetings and rituals.²⁴ But the ecclesiastical groups had to find other ways, and instead they created written networks based on correspondence by letter. In this connection the ideology of friendship played a prominent role. The Christian idea of brotherhood spanned across time and space. Through the letters one could seek the support of brethren and establish a social identity cemented by friendship. These networks comprised much of Europe, and according to Colin Morris they created a “commonwealth of friendship” which united people with shared values and ideals.²⁵

The ecclesiastical groups were not only outside the traditional social structure but also outside the established gender structure. In the feud society masculinity was intimately associated with physical strength and courage and success on the battlefield. Men who did not live up to this ideal were often accused in the sources of being “womanish”, which implied weakness, cowardice, and retreat.²⁶ Since the clerical men were an unarmed group, their status could not be related to the norms and values of feuding culture.²⁷ The fact that they lived in celibacy also meant that they did not belong in the patriarchal hierarchy of the family and the household. The *oratores* of society therefore had to create a gender identity of their own. Jo Ann McNamara claims that the celibacy required by the Gregorian reforms contributed to a fundamental change in the outlook on masculinity and femininity.²⁸ The clerical men strove instead to assert the intellect and the inner qualities that distinguished the virtuous.²⁹

24 On rituals and political culture in northern European society in the Middle Ages, see W. Jezierski *et al.*, 2015.

25 C. Morris, 1991 (1st ed. 1972), p. 104.

26 The Latin word *virtus* can denote both valiant deeds and manliness. The opposite of *viriliter* is often described with the disparaging term *effeminatus*, or womanish. N. Damsholt, 2007, p. 130, n. 17. In ancient and medieval origin myths (*origo gentis*), however, we often find Amazons, female warriors with “manly courage”. They fill a didactic function in that their strength is a consequence of men’s failures. P. Geary, 2006, p. 32. Weak men always risked losing their power or even being killed by women. See e.g. Saxo, 8.5.2. Saxo writes that the Amazon Lathgertha had “a man’s temper in a girl’s body”. Saxo, 9.4.2. This *virago* ideal occurs in the church father Gregory the Great. N. Damsholt, 1985, pp. 68 f. On Amazons, or “shield maidens” in *Gesta Danorum*, see B. Strand (later Sawyer), 1980, pp. 110–117, pp. 158 f.

27 In Scandinavia and parts of the Holy Roman Empire, however, it was not uncommon for churchmen to bear arms. Chivalrous orders connected to the Crusades such as the Knights of Saint John were regarded as brotherhoods of fighting monks.

28 J.A. McNamara, 1994, pp. 3–29.

29 Another group of men who did not bear arms were the courtiers, a motley assembly. They were probably a threat to the clerical elite. Both John of Salisbury and Saxo Grammaticus describe them as unmanly, immoral, and degenerate. John of Salisbury, Chapter 6, p. 44, Chapter 10, pp. 87 ff.; Chapter 18, pp. 120 ff.; Saxo, 14.9.2.

Here Cicero's ethics and ideal of friendship played a prominent part. Virtues such as *sapientia* "wisdom" and *temperantia* "temperance" distinguished the intellectual man. Physical force was countered by the strength of spirit displayed by those who worked in God's name. For them the written word was the chief weapon.³⁰ They represented an ideology of peace that aimed to unite the universal Catholic community. This ideology, which was based on love and friendship, functioned as a counter-force to the norms and patterns of action in the feud society. This quest for a gender identity, a spiritual and social identity, can explain why twelfth-century ecclesiastical groups praised friendship so highly.³¹

Friendship, however, was not just an ideal but also a practical instrument. The written networks were used actively in a reciprocal exchange of services between friends. In many respects they followed the same logic as the networks of the secular world, based on the exchange of gifts, feudal ties, and patronage, but with the difference that communication took place in writing over long distances. Because bonds of friendship were cultivated by letter, clerics could act in furtherance of their own careers within the ecclesiastical organization. Ties of friendship also served collective purposes by creating action groups and interest groups, and they promoted cooperation between collectives. One example is the way Pope Gregory VII, through a friendship network comprising almost the whole of western European Christendom, succeeded in mobilizing the clerical elite in the cause of reform.³² This shows that written communication was well developed at the end of the eleventh century. The bonds could also serve to exclude certain groups from the bureaucratic field, such as secular *literati*.

3.2 *Friendship as a Spiritual and Intellectual Concept*

The fascination with the bond of friendship among twelfth-century intellectuals can thus be explained not only by the purely pragmatic function but also by its importance for spiritual affinity, social identity, and the political order. High medieval thinkers adopted the classical view of friendship as a fundamental constituent element of society and adapted the idea to the reform movement's vision of establishing the City of God on earth. They discussed how a pious life should be lived and how a good society should be organized. This would be done in accordance with the message of collective love and the altruistic ties

30 N. Damsholt, 2004, pp. 132, 137 ff.

31 On the shaping of a masculine identity at the medieval universities, see R. Karras, 1997, pp. 187–202.

32 J. Haseldine, 1994, p. 247.

of friendship that bound the virtuous, who were acting in the best interests of society. In this context the ideology of friendship also became a political ideology in that the medieval thinkers, like the classical authors, emphasized a social order based on consensus.³³

During the twelfth century the view of friendship changed as individual friendships were accepted in a way that had not been possible before.³⁴ This was partly a result of influence from Cicero's ideas about the solidarity of the virtuous. Cistercian theologians played a prominent part in this discourse. Bernard of Clairvaux was heavily influenced by Cicero when he praised the strong idealistic friendship between powerful men.³⁵ For him this was not merely an ideal but also a way to legitimize the policy of the Catholic church, which was dependent on cooperation with influential rulers. At the same time, it was also chiefly among Cistercian authors that Christ-centred friendship was developed into a philosophical and theological doctrine. Like the classical thinkers, they were concerned with exploring the essence of friendship and searching for *vera amicitia*, true friendship. The difference, however, was that these studies had a teleological character, with the goal of finding the way to God. Brian McGuire claims that the twelfth century saw a breakthrough for a new "affective" Christianity oriented to love. Before this the Christian doctrine had been more about sin and punishment than about forgiveness and mercy. There had also been some scepticism about friendship between people within monasticism, where it was thought that the only true friendship was with God.³⁶ For the Cistercians, however, friendship was an obvious part of the new "affective" Christianity in that friendship between people was viewed as a resource and a means to reach God and salvation.

An important part of the twelfth-century renaissance was that the intellectuals, for the first time since the age of the church fathers, began to compose theological, philosophical, and ethical works of their own about love and friendship. Writers at monasteries, universities, and cathedral schools produced treatises, doctrines and even handbooks about friendship.³⁷ The bond was theorized and objectified in that friendship was regarded as a clearly definable independent existence that lay outside the human mind and therefore

33 See e.g. Cicero, *De Re Publica*, I. 39.

34 See McGuire, who discusses how the scepticism about friendship in late antiquity and the early medieval period vanished in the twelfth century. B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. 171.

35 B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. 255.

36 B.P. McGuire, 2007, pp. 21–36.

37 These handbooks, like the works of Cicero and Valerius Maximus, often took the form of collections of exempla.

constituted a kind of natural virtue.³⁸ For clerical intellectuals like Peter the Venerable, Laurence of Durham, Anselm of Bec, Peter of Celle, Peter of Blois, Bernard of Clairvaux, Aelred of Rievaulx, and William of Æbelholt, friendship deriving from divine love was the basic theme of their letters and literary production. Perhaps the best-known theological and philosophical treatise was *De Spiritualis Amicitia*, written by Aelred of Rievaulx around 1150–1165. Proceeding from Cicero's *De Amicitia*, Aelred claimed that friendship was the goal of all spiritual life because it was a way to reach and understand the Lord.³⁹ Theologians like Aelred, Anselm of Bec, and Peter the Venerable created doctrines where Cicero's ideas were integrated with the reformed Christian faith based on the New Testament.⁴⁰ God was now no longer interpreted as a rigid and severe judge but as a loving father.⁴¹ Aelred of Rievaulx asserted that "God is friendship", and authors like Peter the Venerable, like the ancient thinkers, argued that friendship was governed by certain laws.⁴²

3.3 Spiritualis Amicitia

A common theme in the twelfth-century discourse of friendship was spiritual friendship: *spiritualis amicitia*. This was the core of the theological treatises in that it was spiritual friendship that united humans with God. It also provided a foundation for consensus and understanding in the letters exchanged between members of the ecclesiastical elite. Its origin can be found in the classical authors and the church fathers.⁴³ Spiritual friendship was particularly expressed in letters between friends who were separated by long distances. Cicero claimed in *De Amicitia* that love between virtuous men was not dependent on physical presence and that one could even love friends whom one had never met, solely on the basis of a spiritual affinity. This friendship of souls was taken up and developed by the church fathers, who had a great need to communicate with their peers. Letters composed by Ambrose, Augustine, Paulinus of Nola, and Jerome emphasized how friends were in close spiritual contact

38 J. Haseldine, 1999b, p. 242.

39 C. Morris, 1991 (1st ed. 1972), pp. 100–106; B.P. McGuire, 1988, pp. 270 f.; J. Haseldine, 1994, p. 240; J.M. Ziolkowski, 1995, p. 63. Another example of a theological dissertation on friendship is *De Amicitia Christiana* by Peter of Blois.

40 The reformer Peter the Venerable was one of the pioneers in the translation of Islamic sources into Latin. The outlook on friendship in the medieval Muslim works has not yet been studied in any detail.

41 J. Haseldine, 1999b, p. 238.

42 C. Morris, 1991 (1st ed. 1972), p. 106; B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. 270. On Cicero's *codex legum amicitiae*, see R. Hyatte, 1994, p. 29.

43 Spiritual friendship is also prominent in other religions, such as Buddhism.

through their shared spiritual union in Christ. This theme, appealing to the friend's spiritual presence in the letter, even though the person was physically absent, and the classical motif of two hearts and one soul, recurred in the letter writers of the High Middle Ages.⁴⁴ Members of the ecclesiastical and monastic elite were expected to stick together by being united in a spiritual friendship that spurred them to lead a life of virtue, cooperating to find wisdom and thereby the way to God.

According to Brian McGuire, the term itself, *spiritalis amicitia*, can be traced back to the Anglo-Saxon monk, the Venerable Bede (672–735).⁴⁵ In early medieval society the term *amicitia* was primarily associated with political alliances. These could be vertical relationships of subordination or horizontal pacts between different lords. This bond was intimately related to the norms of the feud society, which meant that it entailed military support, protection, or taking revenge. As an alternative to this socio-political friendship, Bede advocated a spiritual friendship suited to the world of the monks.⁴⁶ During the twelfth century this ideal was developed into a key concept for the clerical elite. For theologians like Aelred of Rievaulx and Bernard of Clairvaux, however, it was not only a collective model, as the practice of spiritual friendship was also a way to achieve self-knowledge.⁴⁷ A person's own soul was improved in relation to other human souls in interaction with the divine.

Reginald Hyatte elucidates the high medieval Christian concept of friendship from three aspects: friendship with God (*amicitia Dei*), collective friendship as a bond uniting the entire monastic community, and spiritual friendship – *spiritalis amicitia*.⁴⁸ He defines the latter aspect as

44 B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. 59; R. Hyatte, 1994, p. 46. On Paulinus of Nola's letter to Augustine see C.S. Jaeger, 1999, p. 124, n. 34. For an earlier medieval example, see Alcuin in C.S. Jaeger, 1999, pp. 43 ff.; 125.

45 B.P. McGuire, 1988, pp. 92 ff.

46 Bede mentions the priest Herbert who had long been attached to St Cuthbert (called "God's man") through "the bond of spiritual friendship", *Dei spiritalis amicitiae*, which meant that they would also "be together in heaven". Bede, 4.29.441.

47 C. Morris would place the discovery of the individual in the twelfth-century renaissance. C. Morris, 1991 (1st ed. 1972). See also A. Gurevich, 1995. Eva Österberg has drawn attention to how philosophical discourses about the individual and friendship have gone hand in hand, all the way from antiquity to modern times. She discusses Aristotle's ethics, where the individual arrives at self-knowledge and personal development through friendship with other virtuous people. This ideal friendship was not created for its own sake but so that people would become virtuous citizens. Through this outlook, friendship, according to Österberg, also became a doctrine of society. E. Österberg, 2008, pp. 65 ff.

48 R. Hyatte, 1994, p. 50.

A preferential affection that joins two or a few Christian friends through the medium of God's love. Here the primary conditions are love of God, humble self-love, and charity towards others, to which is added the spiritual love, originating from God, of another for reason of her or his Christian goodness or capacity for virtue.⁴⁹

For clerics in the High Middle Ages these forms of Christian friendship represented true friendship. Their exclusive community elevated itself, not just above secular loyalties associated with kinship and feudal relations, but also over time and space.

3.4 *The Intellectual Field and the Language of Friendship*

During the eleventh century and the twelfth century, then, a new aristocracy was established, building up its positions with partly different reproduction strategies. The traditional way of acquiring a position of power was through force and personal networks resting on marriage alliances and political pacts of friendship.⁵⁰ The rule of celibacy meant that priests and monks did not have an automatic place in this power play. Their chances of building up a position via kinship relations were consequently limited.⁵¹ Clerical dignitaries, however, had other means at their disposal in the form of far-reaching networks of written communication, where the bond of friendship became particularly important.⁵² This meant that churchmen were no longer in the same vertical dependence on the secular power.⁵³ There were now opportunities to act as a more independent group through horizontal interaction. Communication with their supreme head in formal terms, the pope and the curia in Rome, was primarily by letter.

The reformed church organization was a field consisting of a hierarchical bureaucracy where clerics competed for different positions.⁵⁴ In this field the

49 R. Hyatte, 1994, p. 61. On the role of friendship and love in establishing clerical communities in the form of "emotional communities", see B.H. Rosenwein, 2016, pp. 67–113.

50 See e.g. L. Hermanson, 2000.

51 It was already clear in Bede's time that the clerics represented a different social mentality and identity. In an episode about St Alban, Bede tells of how a judge asks the saint: "Of what family or descent are you?" St Alban replies: "What does it concern you of what family I am? [...] I am now a Christian, and employ my time in the practice of Christian duties". Bede, 1.7.31.

52 The clerics likewise used the traditional network strategies, and the secular rulers in the twelfth century began using writing for political purposes.

53 The term "churchman" includes persons belonging to both the secular church and the monastic organization.

54 On the concept of *field*, see P. Bourdieu, 1993 (1980).

rules were partly different from those in the traditional political arena. With the aid of letters the churchmen could forge new contacts and communicate with people they had never met. Through correspondence they were able to keep in touch with old confidants, even though they were far away. In the letters they could seek support and consultation in difficult situations. The clerics' letter writing was thus an important instrument for promotion in the field since it meant that they could take advantage of contacts that could benefit their career.⁵⁵

A basic condition, however, was that they knew the rules of successful written communication. It was not enough just to be able to write and to read Latin. The players on the intellectual field also had to master the sophisticated language of spiritual friendship. This "language of friendship" represented an important symbolic capital for the churchmen, showing that they were initiated in the mysteries of Christian and (directly or indirectly) classical friendship.⁵⁶ It was partly their familiarity with "the language of the Lord" (*lingua Dei*) that distinguished them as a separate group in the elite of society.⁵⁷ Language was a symbolic capital in that it was recognized as something of great value within the ecclesiastical group. The ability to communicate through the application of the terminology of love and friendship revealed an individual's personal virtue and moral stance, and his membership of the Christian fraternity.⁵⁸ He was also expected to act in accordance with the ideals of spiritual friendship, which meant that a norm system had been created and set the tone in the intellectual field.⁵⁹ This made it easier to predict each other's actions. The actions proceeded from a horizon of expectations where they calculated what they could get and what they had to give. Language thus became an important part of the clerical elite's self-image.⁶⁰ During the twelfth century

55 Morris quotes a letter where Bernard of Clairvaux writes to Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury to recommend John of Salisbury, whom he calls "a friend of me and of my friends". Morris writes that these written friendship networks could be used "ruthlessly as pressure groups", but they could also help "remarkably wide circles of people". C. Morris, 1991 (1st ed. 1972), p. 104. See also Gillian R. Knight, 2000.

56 On *symbolic capital*, see P. Bourdieu in D. Broady, 1989, p. 169. Håkan Gunneriusson explains the concept of symbolic capital as "an umbrella term for reputation, renown, respect, and authority". H. Gunneriusson, 2002, p. 19.

57 I.M. Resnick, 1990, pp. 51–74; J. Haseldine, 1994, p. 258; L. Hermanson, 2016, pp. 61–62.

58 B.H. Rosenwein, 2016, pp. 67–113.

59 Compare Pierre Bourdieu's explanation of the term *habitus*, see P. Bourdieu, 1984, p. 171.

60 According to Ezra N. Suleiman, the success of an elite depends on its ability to pass on key elements in its self-image to the surrounding society. E.N. Suleiman, 1978, cited in N. Stenlås, 1998, p. 57. Niklas Stenlås writes that the self-image "comprises the view of who can be perceived as equals and which people one can reckon with. The self-image also includes the norm system that regulates interaction within the elite group, the view of what is valuable, estimable, and deserving". N. Stenlås, 1998, p. 57.

letters of friendship developed into a literary genre of its own. Collections of the letters of men like Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter the Venerable, Peter of Blois, and John of Salisbury served as models for this literary style.⁶¹ The high prestige of the language of friendship was not just a social marker but also had a spiritual and emotional function by virtue of its suitability for expressing strong feelings.⁶² It was simultaneously used for educational purposes in the intellectual exchange between the humanists of the twelfth-century renaissance.⁶³

The written networks and the increased importance of the ecclesiastic organization meant that the prelates became a significant power factor in society. In accordance with the theses of the reform movement, an ideology was developed in which the clerical elite was thought to be entitled to a share in the government of kingdoms. John of Salisbury represented a political ideology which claimed that the king ought to "receive counsel from men of letters".⁶⁴ He equated this category with the *clerici* of society. In the field constituted by the princely courts and their bureaucratic apparatus, however, there was competition with the secular officials and courtiers. John of Salisbury warned the

61 N. Damsholt, 1978, pp. 1, 11.

62 John Boswell has asserted that clerical circles in the High Middle Ages had a tolerant attitude to love between men. He claims that no distinction was made within this culture between passionate friendships that included sex and those which did not. Boswell discusses, for example, the erotic elements that can be found in the writings of Anselm of Bec and Aelred of Rievaulx. He regards Anselm's passionate language of love as an expression of a monastic theology that comprised homosexual emotions. J. Boswell, 1980, pp. 218 f. Aelred of Rievaulx is interpreted as the writer who "gave love between those of the same gender its most profound and lasting expression in a Christian context". He thus considers it obvious that Aelred was a homosexual. J. Boswell, 1980, pp. 221 ff. Yet this "clerical gay culture", according to Boswell, was replaced in the late Middle Ages by a hostile attitude to homosexuality in the church. He also examines relations of friendship and love between men in the secular world, such as Richard the Lionheart's "love affair" with King Philip Augustus of France. J. Boswell, 1980, pp. 231 f. Boswell has been criticized in several reviews, however, for having an anachronistic outlook when he interprets the relations between men as expressions of homosexual love. See e.g. J. Adams, 1981, pp. 350 ff.; J. Weeks, 1980, p. 41 f. For a survey of all the reviews, see W. Johansson, W.R. Dynes & J. Lauritsen, 2003, <http://www.pinktriangle.org.uk/lib/hic/bibliography.html>. For a different interpretation of the relationship between Richard the Lionheart and Philip Augustus, see C.S. Jaeger, 1999, p. 145. Jaeger criticizes Boswell for claiming that the question whether Aelred of Rievaulx, Anselm of Bec, and others were homosexual is wrongly posed. "It is a bit like asking whether they were liberals, Jacobites or Unitarians. The category did not exist and using it thrusts an alien set of values onto a sensibility which is delicate and wants reconstruction on its own terms". C.S. Jaeger, 1999, p. 26.

63 J. Haseldine, 1994, p. 258.

64 John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, Chapter 6, p. 44.

princes not to take advice from these “charlatans” and “flatterers” and emphasized that the king should be subordinate to ecclesiastical discipline.⁶⁵ He also held up the importance of education, declaring that an unlettered king was a “crowned ass”.⁶⁶ If a virtuous king happened to be illiterate, it was essential that he took counsel from lettered men, which for John was synonymous with clerics. He also stresses the virtue of wisdom, *sapientia*, which for him is chiefly represented by men of letters.

3.5 *Abbot William's Collection of Letters*

Parts of Abbot William of Æbelholt's collection of letters serve as a Nordic example of the literary genre of “letters of friendship”. William was a canon of the Augustinian friary of St Geneviève in France. In 1165 he was invited to Denmark by his friend, Bishop Absalon of Roskilde. The two churchmen had probably become acquainted while Absalon was a student in Paris. The bond of friendship bore fruit when the Danish bishop entrusted William with the task of reforming the community of canons on the island of Eskilsø. A few years later, under William's leadership, the abbey of Æbelholt was founded on Sjælland. Here he served as abbot until his death in 1203. William carried on lively correspondence with the leading temporal and ecclesiastical dignitaries of the time. The Augustinian canons often undertook public assignments for secular authorities in need of their expertise in matters requiring written communication. William was engaged, for example, by the Danish king and the archbishop as a scribe in contacts with the French king Phillip Augustus.

In William's collection there are several letters that can be described as typical friendship letters. The majority of these were written during the years 1194 and 1195.⁶⁷ The letters have different functions in that they serve pragmatic, spiritual, and literary didactic purposes. Among the pragmatic functions we can number contacts with powerful men. In these letters the abbot pleads for protection, assistance, and sometimes economic support (see Chapter 4, p. 166). Besides this vertical communication we also find the horizontal exchange between different ecclesiastical institutions such as monasteries inside and outside Denmark. Here he appeals for the support of other brethren, and

65 Here John derived arguments from an ancient tradition concerning advisors as flatterers. The tradition lived on during the Renaissance; see e.g. Machiavelli, Chapter 23, pp. 63–64.

66 John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, Chapter 6, p. 44.

67 N. Damsholt, 1978, p. 6. Damsholt points out that we cannot say with certainty whether they are “real letters” or not, that is to say, if they were actually sent or not. This would mean that they mainly had spiritual and literary didactic functions. Since we shall never be able to settle this matter, the letters will be treated here as if they were copies of letters that were really sent.

not infrequently begs directly or indirectly for gifts and repayment for favours. In several of William's letters the spiritual friendship between equals is at the centre. He stresses the internal solidarity within the small but exclusive ecclesiastical community. Spiritual friendship serves moral purposes such as true belief and guidance in following the path of virtue.

According to the Danish historian Nanna Damsholt, however, the letters also have a literary didactic purpose, since they served as a collection of examples for poetry composition and the noble art of letter writing – *ars dictaminis*.⁶⁸ This included mastering the language of friendship. One of the likely reasons why Bishop Absalon invited his friend William to Denmark was that he wanted to train the native churchmen. The abbot was one of the country's leading figures in the art of writing, and the preface to his collection of letters testifies to his didactic calling. He writes there that the fraternity "has specified these *carmina* [poems/spells; italics mine] for those who wish to make progress in dictation".⁶⁹ William, and probably indirectly Absalon, were thus concerned about the reproduction of cultural capital in the Danish clerical elite, which was an important stage in its social formation.

We cannot separate these friendship letters into pragmatic and spiritual categories since the rhetoric of spiritual love and friendship was often part of a pragmatic framework. In a letter to the monk Stephen, Abbot William combines the classical and the Christian rhetoric of friendship:

For with reference to love a law has been instituted; he who transgresses it, though he be called friend, does not nourish love. Do you wish to know this law? Where there is a fixed link between souls there is scarcely any doubt that there is also community in the Holy Spirit. But if it is true, or more correctly, because it is true, genuine friends are united in a corresponding bond, so that they cannot stand if anything harmful leading to separation should trespass in the field of love [...] yet an outsider cannot share this good [...] nor can a person who is not related in the flesh, because he does not understand what belongs to God [1 Corinthians] [...] Without you our existence would be nothing or insignificant [...] and the true love never knows lukewarm laxity with reference to friends' distress, but is wholly prepared to provide the requested services.⁷⁰

68 N. Damsholt, 1978, pp. 8 f.

69 Who this audience was is difficult to say, but Damsholt points out that, according to William, they were among his closest men, attached to him through "the glue of love". Damsholt's interpretation is that he was primarily addressing the Augustinian canons in Æbelholt. N. Damsholt, 1978, p. 7.

70 Will. ep. II. 76.

In the letter William thus refers to spiritual friendship between two people. Here we see an esoteric trait, since this exclusive bond is reserved for a small group of initiates; an “outsider” or “a person who is not related in the flesh” cannot share this good. At the same time, spiritual friendship also has a pragmatic purpose in that it obliges a friend to be prepared to provide the requested service. In the name of spiritual friendship, a set of rules is evoked which governs how a friend is expected to act in different situations.⁷¹ Consequently, warm proofs of friendship often also contain a large element of duty. If a person broke these rules, he was not considered a true friend and thus no longer belonged to the band of the virtuous. It may seem somewhat paradoxical, but the conclusion must be that, embedded in this sweet language of love and friendship, there were also implicit threats and admonitions. This interplay between spirituality and pragmatism is seen in several of William’s letters, and it is also a typical feature of the European letter collections.⁷²

For William, as also for Saxo Grammaticus (see page 89), the notion of *fides* was a prerequisite for a harmonious and stable community. These ideas emanated from an old Roman tradition in which relationships governed by *fides* were, for instance, those between two friends (*amicus-amicus*), between father and household (*pater-familia*), between father and son (*pater-filius*), and between patron and client (*patronus-cliens*).⁷³ The paternal view was of course obvious in William’s letters where he presented himself as a father for his children/brothers on whom he depended so much. For instance, he dedicated his letter collection to his disciples, that is, those to whom he was devoted through “the glue of love”, *caritas*.⁷⁴ As an abbot he sometimes acted as a *patronus* and conversely, as a client in his conflicts with the local magnates. When communicating with royals and dignitaries such as Archbishop Absalon and his successor Anders Sunesen (r. 1201–1222) William’s language would become deeply subservient, almost in line with the Roman relationship between master and slave (*dominus-servus*).⁷⁵

71 Using Bourdieu’s theoretical terminology, spiritual friendship could be interpreted as alluding to the *habitus* of the spiritual actor.

72 For a thorough analysis of John of Salisbury’s correspondence see J. McLoughlin, 1990, pp. 165–182.

73 On the Roman concept of *fides*, see e.g. J.P. Adams, 2009, <http://www.csun.edu/~hcfll004/fides.html>. For medieval views on *fides*/loyalty, see M.P. Alberzoni, 2015, pp. 161–182; K. Oschema, 2015, pp. 25–48.

74 N. Damsholt, 2001, p. 12.

75 L. Hermanson, 2016, pp. 79–80. See also the rhetoric of praise in late antiquity and the early medieval period, as represented by writers like Venantius Fortunatus, p. 37.

3.6 *The Terminology of Friendship*

Several scholars claim that the language of spiritual friendship was created in the twelfth century.⁷⁶ It then became very popular at monasteries, cathedral schools and universities. This language, however, should not only be viewed as a new literary style; above all it was a communicative innovation. In pace with the social formation of the clerical elite and the increasing importance of written networks, the members had to create a functioning language for communication within the group. Secular political culture was mainly based on the oral transmission of information, with well-established patterns of action which were often expressed ritually. The forging of personal bonds, decision making, and conflict resolution were thus dependent on face-to-face relations. In rituals such as swearing oaths, newly contracted relationships were visualized and materialized through gestures, speech, ritual objects, and exchanges of gifts. These ceremonial acts were complex in that they also worked on a spiritual level (see Chapter 3). The bonds were, however, contextual because they were linked to the ritual occasion.

In the clerical political culture that functioned through written networks, a different state prevailed in which all deeds and symbolic figures of thought had to be clad in words. Churchmen were therefore forced to create a language that was as rich and multidimensional as the performative expressions of traditional ritual. The language of friendship thus followed a kind of ritual logic by being built up around a formalized pattern. The use of a specific terminology had the goal of making readers think and act along the same lines. Terms of love and friendship such as *caritas*, *amor*, *dilectio*, *devotio*, *affectus*, and *vera amicitia* were thus intended to create shared forms of association.⁷⁷ Within this semiotic community the terms and formulae themselves became codes and symbols in the same way as the visualized expressions of traditional ritual.⁷⁸ Embedded in the language of friendship were identity-creating spiritual and social markers, which made this form of art into prestigious symbolic capital. Written

76 C. Morris, 1991 (1972), p. 104; B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. 66; J. Haseldine, 1994, p. 241; R. Hyatte, 1994, pp. 48 f.

77 Regarding the use of linguistic codes see Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "symbolic power". P. Bourdieu, 1991 (1982). On rhetorical schemes and "code-switching" see L. Hermanson, 2013, pp. 111–113.

78 The emotional discourse could be adapted to different "emotional, textual, and interpretive communities", L. Hermanson, 2016, p. 68. On the concept of emotional community, see B.H. Rosenwein, 2016. For the concept of "textual community", see B. Stock, 1982, pp. 88–92, 526. On the concept of "interpretive community", see S. Fish, 1980. For the concept of semiotic community and culture as practice, see W.H. Sewell, 2005a (1st ed. 1999), pp. 86 ff. See also *Epilogue*, p. 246.

culture, however, in contrast to the oral political culture, represented an autonomous language of friendship, not bound to any specific situation.⁷⁹ This meant that the terminology was linked to a universal norm system. In the oral culture the norms were instead activated in concrete situations.⁸⁰ The written discourse of friendship functioned within a constant framework, which meant that the terms had an eternal and all-embracing meaning. Consequently, this friendship was seldom bound to one situation.

In this connection it is important not to read the modern meaning of love and friendship into the medieval texts. Letters of friendship were public documents which, despite their highly personal and intimate expression, were often addressed to larger collectives.⁸¹ When, for example, an abbot received a letter from one of his distant friends, it was read aloud to the whole fraternity. Abbot William often wrote in “we” form, showing that this was public communication between groups. The language of friendship thus cannot be assigned to some private, individual sphere; it was adapted for active use in the intellectual field. Brian McGuire cites a letter from Stephen of Tournai to Bishop Omer of Ribe in which the sender claims that friendship exists for four reasons: “dialogue, mutual service, frequent exchange of letters, or the renown of virtue.”⁸² The letters must therefore have been an important instrument for marking or expanding a position in the intellectual field. A letter from Abbot William, for example, was a public document in which he could demonstrate the symbolic capital of the brothers in Æbelholt. The letters were not just a strategy for William to gain renown for personal virtue; they gave the whole abbey increased repute, respect, and hence authority in the arena of the ecclesiastical elite.⁸³ Letters of friendship exchanged between two prominent intellectuals often developed into a public form of ideal friendship, and therefore the letters were not infrequently copied to serve as models for coming generations of intellectuals. Letter collections of this type consequently helped to confirm and reproduce systems of norms and values.

79 On how writing established a context-free language or an “autonomous discourse”, see E.D. Hirsch, 1977, pp. 21–23, 26; D.R. Olson, 1980, pp. 186–196. Walter Ong explains the autonomous account as a “discourse which cannot be directly questioned or contested as oral speech can be because written discourse has been detached from its author”. W. Ong, 1982, p. 78. See also M. Innes, 1998, pp. 3–36. In oral cultures, however, rituals and prophecies can be viewed as a kind of autonomous accounts. The person conveying the message is just a medium, not a source.

80 H.J. Orning, 2008, pp. 6–9; G. Koziol, 2012, p. 9.

81 J. Haseldine says that the letters represented “a most public type of writing, without the privacy or intimacy which can be possible in modern letters”. J. Haseldine, 1994, p. 258.

82 B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. 364.

83 William was canonized in 1224, which shows his prominent position in this field. On the concept of “strategy” see P. Bourdieu, 1977, p. 9.

3.7 *Living Friendship*

Ties of friendship in the written networks largely followed the same logic as the traditional networks. The bonds had to be constantly cultivated so that they would not die out. In the secular field relations were kept warm through frequent meetings where the friendship was renewed or confirmed through gifts and oaths. In the Old Icelandic *Poetic Edda* the longest poem is *Hávamál* (*Sayings of the High One*). This stresses the importance of cultivating friendship through recurrent meetings: “you know, if you’ve a friend, one whom you trust well, go to see him often; for brushwood grows, and tall grass, on the road which no man treads”.⁸⁴ For the clerical elite these meetings were often replaced with written meetings. Yet this did not prevent the “familiar conversation” that was considered in medieval and classical texts to be a characteristic of genuine friendship and trust in political communication.⁸⁵ In the letters of friendship there is often mention of intimate dialogue between friends. Abbot William writes in a letter to his close friend, the Danish magnate Peder Sunesen, that “nothing is sweeter in human existence than a familiar conversation with a friend, and for a friend a conversation can never appear too long”.⁸⁶ A recurrent theme in the medieval letters is that the sender is spiritually present when the receiver reads the letter, even though they are physically separated by long distances. In a letter from Archbishop Eskil of Lund (archbishop 1138–1177) to Ernisius of St Victor in Paris he writes

Since it befits a friend to look on an absent friend with the eyes of a loving disposition, as if he were present, let not the distance between our locations keep us apart, when a lasting union in generous affections glues us together.⁸⁷

Gifts and mutual favours also played an important part in the written networks. The letters themselves were regarded as gifts in an exchange system intended to keep the relationships alive.⁸⁸ A much desired gift that was often requested and confirmed in the correspondence between ecclesiastical institutions was prayers. Praying for a friend or a group of friends was regarded as

84 *Sayings of the High One (Hávamál)*, 119.28. On the view of friendship in *Hávamál*, see also M. Mauss, 1966 (1923), pp. xiv; A. Gurevich, 1968, pp. 126–138; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 2007, pp. 81 f.; E. Österberg, 2007, p. 95.

85 G. Althoff, 1999, p. 96.

86 Will. ep. 11 30. See also Will. ep. 11 40, and Will. ep. 1 37.

87 DD/192: 1169–1170.

88 In a letter to Count Bernhard of Ratzeburg, William writes that “you shall know that we regard your letter as a great gift, and that we are obliged to return your favour at a given place and time with great and good proof of obligingness”. Will. ep. 11 15.

one of the prime duties of friendship.⁸⁹ Reciprocal prayer agreements were therefore contracted between different monastic houses where the monks or the nuns pledged to pray for each other's souls.⁹⁰ This was not just a spiritual service but also part of the pragmatic cooperation within a network. Prayers as a gift showed that the agreements were sincere. These prayer agreements can therefore be likened to secular pacts of friendship where the honest intentions were confirmed with gifts. In a letter to the convent in Slangerup (northern Sjælland) William writes that the monks have received "gifts of *caritas*", which probably means that the nuns have donated their prayers to the canons of Æbelholt. For the abbot the concept of *caritas* means that a sincere agreement has been established between the monasteries, based on love:

There is however one thing that grants the remedy of consolation to us, namely, the sincere feeling of love which, once it has arisen between friends, never grows old, but rather when it lacks the nourishment of conversation together flourishes in vigour at the most recent letter received.⁹¹

Prayers were also the primary gift of monks and nuns to secular rulers. In exchange for the brothers' or sisters' prayers, princes granted them protection. One example is a charter issued by the Swedish king Knut⁹² Eriksson (r. 1167–1195/96), stating that the monks in Viby have admitted the king to their brotherhood and made him a part of their prayers and their divine service. In return for this he promises to act as their guardian and patron (see p. 193). The link between professions of friendship, gifts, and requests for return favours is sometimes noticeable in William's letters. In a letter to the bishop of Skara in Sweden he writes:

We give manifold praise, Father and lord, that you who are far away, not in spirit, but in the flesh, grant the grace to let us attain your holy friendship and love [...] If only our work may have earned the reward of such esteem [...] ⁹³

89 J. Haseldine, 1999b, p. 251.

90 These prayers also included intercession for dead souls.

91 Will. ep. 1 28.

92 Consistency in the treatment of proper names is virtually impossible. One example is the name which in Latin sources is spelled *Canutus/Kanutus* while Old Norse texts have *Knútr*; in modern works this name becomes *Canute* in English, *Knut* in Swedish, and *Knud* in Danish. The principle applied here is to choose the relevant form used by historians in the respective Nordic countries. Anglicized forms are generally used with reference to England and the Continent. Quoted translations may apply different principles.

93 Will. ep. 11 16.

In William's correspondence, then, we see several of the desires that dominated the secular political arena, such as the search for goodwill – *captatio benevolentiae*, desires for unbreakable bonds and assurances of trust – *fides* (see Chapter 3). William claims in a letter that "love nourishes trust".⁹⁴ At the same time, several letters bear witness to bitter conflicts where the trust was put to the test. These disputes were fought not just with secular rulers but also with members of the clerical elite. One example is the protracted discord with the Cistercian brotherhood in Esrom in Sjælland. In several letters to Abbot Walbert of Esrom, William wages a rhetorical battle with his counterpart.⁹⁵ With the language of love and friendship the parties try to arrive at a solution to the conflict and repair the formerly good relationship between the monasteries. Here William reminds Walbert of the help that was promised and the gifts that never came, with the result that the trust between the brotherhoods is reduced. He nevertheless entertains a hope that the sincere friendship will be restored so that "the fraternal love between us will be unshaken".⁹⁶ There could thus be "feuds" even within the monastic sphere. The conflicts were often protracted, and in these processes the emotional and ritual language of friendship played an important part in repairing and re-establishing broken communities and collaborations.⁹⁷

Among clerics, then, friendship and love were not just a collective spiritual ideal that united all Christians around a shared vision of society. Friendship also functioned as an elitist charismatic ideal that played an important role for the creation of social identity. In the written intellectual exchange, the language of friendship was a status marker, bringing together an exclusive group who represented the Christian cardinal virtues – *sacrae virtutes*. This meant that the clerics combined classical elitist ideals with the Christian idea of brotherhood.⁹⁸ Friendship thus served both spiritual and pragmatic purposes.

94 Will. ep. 11 59.

95 Unfortunately no letters written by Walbert are extant. One reason for the discord between the monasteries was competition for the recruitment of rich men's sons. Another reason was a conflict over the rights to collect tithes in the parish of Tjæreby. On this conflict see B.P. McGuire, 1973, pp. 143 ff.

96 Will. ep. 1 36; 1 37; 1 38.

97 Barbara H. Rosenwein applies a constructivist perspective when she claims, in opposition to Norbert Elias, that medieval people were not prisoners of their emotions. Instead they chose after pragmatic consideration of how they wished to express their feelings. B.H. Rosenwein, 2006. Other scholars such as Gerd Althoff, Stephen Jaeger, Geoffrey Koziol, and Stephen D. White declare that emotions were used strategically by the actors. See e.g. S.D. White, 1998, p. 151.

98 The classical virtues were wisdom (*sapientia*), moderation/temperance (*temperantia*), strength/courage (*fortitudo*), and justice (*iustitia*). The Christian cardinal virtues were piety, religion, and faith. Q. Skinner, 1978, pp. 124 ff.

Language was a symbolic capital which was a necessary condition for obtaining a position in the spiritual field. The bond of friendship, however, was also an instrument for using and building up social capital by taking advantage of the intellectual networks. The letter was thus a gift that was both spiritual and pragmatic in character.⁹⁹

4 The Secular Elite

Earlier research has discussed whether it was the clerical culture or the secular courtly culture that was the main force driving the twelfth-century cult of friendship (see p. 44). Scholars have often made a distinction between the spiritual view of friendship as a social ideal and a way to reach God, and the ideal of friendship among the temporal aristocracy, which was primarily regarded as an element of courtly behaviour.¹⁰⁰ Colin Morris claims that the friendship ideology of the secular elite, in accordance with the classical Ciceronian pattern, was more individualistic in character, and therefore cannot be associated with any broader vision of society.¹⁰¹

In the sections that follow we will look more closely at the purposes for which the secular aristocracy used the ideology of friendship. The focus is on social formation, as I examine the cultural environment and the socio-political conditions that determined how the secular elite viewed friendship and love. I proceed from the thesis that it is not possible to make a sharp distinction between a clerical and a secular aristocracy, and thus it is not possible to work with the dichotomy of ecclesiastical and secular discourses of friendship. It was rather a general intellectual aristocratic phenomenon. I will therefore show how authors in the High Middle Ages combined classical and Christian ideals of friendship. In this connection an analysis of *Gesta Danorum* (c. 1198–1210) by the Danish author Saxo Grammaticus will serve as a case study and an illustrative example. But let us begin by looking at the link between the twelfth-century ideology of friendship and the social formation of the aristocracy.

4.1 *The Position of the Aristocracy in Society*

The dominant place of the secular elite had traditionally been justified by its role as a warrior caste with the duty of defending the other members of

99 Marcel Mauss asserts that giving a gift in different tribal societies always had a spiritual dimension in that the giver also gave part of his body and soul, which meant that the receiver acquired a part of his spiritual being. M. Mauss, 1966 (1923), pp. 6–16.

100 On friendship as a doctrine of society and salvation, see E. Österberg, 2008, p. 67.

101 C. Morris, 1991 (1972), p. 117.

society. The social and political upheaval in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, however, meant that this basis for legitimacy could no longer be taken for granted. An important consequence of the economic boom in the period was that war and plunder were not the only sources by which prosperity could now be attained. The growing trade and urbanization had led to the rise of new groups with plenty of capital, such as the merchants and to some extent the craftsmen. At the same time, the cultural environment had changed with the formation of the clerical elite. Earlier in the Middle Ages the churchmen had primarily worked in the same intellectual sphere as the secular aristocracy. During the eleventh century, however, they had succeeded in creating a more autonomous field. This is not to say that the secular aristocracy was outside this sphere. Magnate families in northern and western Europe often sent one or more of their young members to study at cathedral schools or universities. This meant that a nobleman could have one son who was a warrior, one son who was a prelate, and a daughter who was a nun.

The intellectual sphere, however, had been significantly enlarged because it was filled with a great many different actors who represented different stances as regards the social and political order. Within this field there was the clerical elite of the reform movement which advocated the ideal of the City of God, where the pope and the church were not subordinate to the temporal power. A different orientation was represented by those who promoted sovereign royal power, claiming that the king or the emperor occupied an office instituted by the Lord, and therefore prelates and magnates were obliged to take their place in the royal hierarchy. This view was also supported by people in the clergy who were indebted to a prince for their offices. Finally, a third stance is represented chiefly by members of the high secular aristocracy. Their position was that government should rest on consensus between the chief men of the realm. Representatives of royal power, the church, and the secular aristocracy should work together for the good of society. The magnates thus had an obvious place in government by acting as the prince's advisors.

The established aristocracy was thus challenged from several different directions. Its position in the government of kingdoms was threatened by royal officials and knights from the lower nobility.¹⁰² The group of knights was characterized by high social mobility, since a successful warrior could advance

102 One example is the royal German officials of low or unfree birth known as *ministeriales*, see K. Bosl, 1972, pp. 190–211. Another new type of progressive people in authority were the *castellani*, castle commanders who employed brutal methods to build up private local power bases. T.N. Bisson, 1995, pp. 743–759. According to Bisson, these commanders overturned the social order in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, after which “feudal anarchy” arose. Bisson’s interpretation has however been criticized by many scholars. See the debate in *Past & Present* nos. 152 and 155, 1996.

politically and socially in a short time.¹⁰³ Princes tried in various ways to liberate themselves from dependence on the high aristocracy. With the development of the monetary system it became more common in the twelfth century for princes to choose to buy the assistance of mercenaries in warfare, rather than relying on the military forces of the magnates.¹⁰⁴ Another way for kings to distance themselves from the indigenous high aristocracy was that they entered into personal alliances with foreign princes, which often resulted in a strengthening of their economic and military resources. A newly acceded prince strove to create an aristocracy of his own to serve as his inner circle of loyal followers and counsellors who were indebted to him for their positions.¹⁰⁵ The accession of a new monarch was thus a constant threat to the magnates surrounding the previous ruler. Because we generally use the term “the secular aristocracy”, then, we ought to be aware that this was an ever-changing group.

4.2 *The Strategies of the Secular Elite to Legitimize Its Authority*

In the twelfth century above all, however, one can discern a social and political development where certain groups used different means to consolidate and legitimize their position in society. It was this process that later led to the rise of the nobility as one of the estates of the realm. In this time of social upheaval it became increasingly important for the aristocracy to make other groups in society understand that their exercise of power was rightful. They legitimized their prominent positions through *tradition*, that is to say, they invoked the right to rule others through time-honoured custom, and through *legal strategies*, such as various statutory rights and privileges, and through *charisma*, asserting that they belonged to a special noble stratum in society whose radiance and noble qualities qualified them to lead other groups.¹⁰⁶

103 During the twelfth century success in combat was one of the primary means of social advancement. P. Contamine, 1984, p. 254.

104 In the High Middle Ages the princes not infrequently turned to the burghers, who could grant loans and contribute to the financing of their warfare. In return the burghers could receive special privileges and rights.

105 The term “prince” refers here to kings and also other rulers such as dukes, earls, chieftains, counts, and barons. Medieval Europe displayed multiple rulership structures. Several territories were dominions loosely subject to kings or emperors. Examples are Flanders, Burgundy, or the earldom of Orkney. Kingship was thus not the predominant form of government in the High Middle Ages. In the source material we come across a great many different titles for rulers, such as *dominus*, *princeps*, *dux*, *comes*, *praefectus*, etc. It is therefore misleading to analyse the medieval power structure as consisting of three main elements: king–church–aristocracy.

106 On the legitimization of power see M. Weber, 1978 (1922), pp. 212–254.

It became more important to invoke tradition with the spread of written culture. The ancient ancestry and history of the aristocratic dynasties was highlighted through the establishment of family names and more or less fictitious genealogies.¹⁰⁷ With royal dynasties as their model, the nobility created dynasties of their own, with names linked to their castles or original family estates.¹⁰⁸ The elite of western Europe thus gradually shifted to an agnatic system in which kinship was chiefly reckoned from father to son, which meant that the eldest son took priority in inheritance.¹⁰⁹ Social capital was strengthened with the aid of an active marriage policy whereby magnates enhanced the family status by intermarrying in lines with royal blood. In this connection, the aristocrats could take advantage of political conflicts by pursuing a dynamic alliance policy. Multiple vassal relationships brought them into alliance with people in power who could benefit their personal interests at a particular time. The reputation and the historical legacy of family members was maintained in collaboration with churches and monastic houses. By founding monasteries and making lavish donations to ecclesiastical institutions, the magnates boosted the family status in the sacred hierarchy as well. In exchange for these pious acts, the monks promised to pray for the souls of their benefactors. The monasteries also established memorial books or fraternity lists of patron families, which meant that the names of the noble lines and the family members were preserved for posterity.¹¹⁰

In the High Middle Ages this aristocracy began to employ judicial means to enforce their authority. This development started in France and Germany, where the magnates used the modern juridical apparatus to assert their specific rights. This could concern land ownership, rules that the peasants had to grind their grain at the lord's mills, special regulations for court proceedings and military service or hunting and fishing rights. The magnates could also claim special privileges on account of their military resources. By exploiting internal strife in princely families, they could obtain tax reductions or tax exemption in return for providing military support to their lords. These privileges increased in significance as the administrative apparatus was gradually expanded. The

107 P. Geary, 1994b, pp. 23–47.

108 In German research this process has been called *Verherrschaftlichung*, see K. Schmid, 1979, pp. 38 f.; G. Tellenbach, 1979, pp. 219 f.; G. Althoff, 2005. On the rise of a hereditary privileged landowning aristocracy in France, see M. Bloch, 1971b (1st ed. 1939), pp. 283–292, 320–331, G. Duby, 1953, pp. 230–245, G. Bois, 1992.

109 See e.g. G. Duby, 1953, pp. 230–245; F. & J. Gies, 1989, pp. 121–132.

110 In Germany these sources are called *libri memoriales*. They have been important source material for researchers studying the group formation and internal structure of the aristocracy. See e.g. K. Schmid, 1979, pp. 42 ff.

privileges were confirmed in written agreements, which meant that they became permanent and were thus inherited by subsequent generations. It was probably the clerical elite that served as a model for this development.

The ideology of friendship and love was especially enlisted when the aristocracy sought to legitimize its power through charisma.¹¹¹ The magnates strove to distinguish themselves as a group with extraordinary status in society through various ways of distancing themselves from the rest of the population. In archaic Greece the ruling group called themselves *aristoi*, meaning “the best”. They had the prime qualities (*arete*) and therefore had a kind of natural right to govern. This outlook was then passed on to Roman thinkers like Cicero, and the idea found favour again during the twelfth-century renaissance. The distancing was achieved by creating an exclusive image for the magnates as a group. They could do this through distinctive forms of behaviour and outward manifestations such as rituals, education in *mores*, that is, the art of deporting oneself, sumptuous consumption, mortuary customs, monumental buildings, lavish clothes, and demonstrations of authority in the spiritual sphere. They could also give mystique to their own community through esotericism, establishing closed societies to which only initiates were admitted. These could be intellectual communities where a specific language or education gave an admission ticket, or spiritual fraternities such as chivalrous orders.¹¹²

When their power position came under question during the twelfth century, the secular aristocracy felt a need to create an exclusive identity and a symbolic capital.¹¹³ In the intellectual and political spheres they were threatened by the clerical elite. In economic terms they encountered competition from the burghers, whose prosperity and material resources matched their own in many respects.¹¹⁴ Primogeniture caused the rise of a significant group of knights who did not inherit any land and were forced to enter patron-client relations with different feudal lords. Modern research on military history has shown that it was only to a limited extent that magnates had a monopoly on the right to bear arms.¹¹⁵ There were other groups in society who had war as their main source of livelihood, and the development of military technology was tending

111 Bonds of friendship obviously played an important role for the acquisition of social capital.

112 On intellectual communities, see B. Stock's term “textual community”, B. Stock, 1982, pp. 88–92, 526.

113 The question, however, is whether the *potentes* had an undoubted power position in the Early Middle Ages. It is likely that this “group” had been more or less continually in transformation. L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 24 ff.

114 This was particularly noticeable in southern Europe.

115 P. Contamine, 1984, pp. 65–100, 242 ff.; N. Lund, 1996, pp. 27–57.

towards commercialization, with soldiers fighting in exchange for pay.¹¹⁶ This meant that the ideals of friendship and loyalty in the political culture were weakened, and therefore the nobility tried by various means to uphold these values in order to appear more noble than other armed groups.

4.3 *The Ideal Aristocrat*

The increased competition for the intellectual sphere meant that the traditional ideal of a warrior society, emphasizing the primary qualities of physical strength and courage, had to be supplemented with new models stressing internal qualities. Strength and courage were attributes that even a simple man could possess.¹¹⁷ A need therefore arose to create an ideal image of the aristocratic man. This was a person of exemplary goodness, representing a kind of *homo virtutis*. This individual's character was shaped by the noblest sentiments, which at this time were love and friendship. These mental qualities steered the virtuous magnate's righteous actions because he had a special moral and intellectual equipment. An inner nobility set its stamp on his outer nature.

Medieval sources often describe the physical beauty of aristocratic heroes. They were of impressive stature and attractive appearance. The eyes were regarded as the mirror of the soul, and thus a recurrent theme in medieval literature is the aristocrat's burning and intensive gaze. Saxo Grammaticus, in the legendary part of *Gesta Danorum*, tells of the Danish princes Regner and Thorald who were hated by their stepmother, the Swedish Queen Thorild. She made the youths into slaves with the task of watching the king's cows. Svanhvit, daughter of the Danish king, then travelled to Sweden to liberate her countrymen. When she met Regner he said that he was a slave, but Svanhvit replied:

The shimmering flicker of your eyes, she said, pronounces you the progeny of kings, not of slaves. Your form reveals your race, just as in your glittering look Nature's beauty shines out. Your sharp sight displays the

¹¹⁶ Another way to profit from war was to take captives and demand ransoms. M. Howard, 1976, p. 7. Mercenaries, however, existed already in the Early Middle Ages.

¹¹⁷ Social mobility was probably high in the plunder economy when violence was the major source of prosperity. Successful independent operation of war bands of simple origin could thus amass considerable material resources in a short time. The leader could then display their wealth through external manifestations, such as splendid clothes and ornaments. The established aristocracy was thus forced to mark its position against different types of upstarts. This could be done, for example, by emphasizing one's close ties to the royal family or one's innate qualities. The condemnation of gluttony and avarice was thus an important aristocratic ideal. In Palermo in the late nineteenth century the members of mafia families showed off by wearing expensive clothes and jewellery on Sundays. Through their apparel they thus outshone the dress of the higher social groups. J. Dickie, 2004, pp. 84, 89.

splendour of your birth and there is no indication of humble origin when the handsomeness which graces you is a manifest token of your nobility.¹¹⁸

The need to legitimize the hierarchical social order can also be seen in the Old Norse poem *Rígsþula*.¹¹⁹ This tells of how the god Heimdall, using the name Rig, comes to the world of mortals. Here he visits three couples who represent different social groups: the unfree, the peasants, and the aristocracy. First Rig comes to the simple dwelling of the aged couple Great-grandfather (Ái) and Great-grandmother (Edda). He shares a bed with the couple, and nine months later the old woman has a child who is given the name Thrall:

on his hands there was wrinkled skin,
knotted knuckles,
thick fingers, he had an ugly face,
a crooked back, long heels.¹²⁰

Then Rig visits the farm of Grandfather (Afi) and Grandmother (Amma). They represent the farmers and live in prosperity. After he spends the night with the couple they have a son named Farmer (Karl). He is described as a healthy with lively eyes. He grows up to be a capable, hard-working man. He forms a happy family with children bearing names like Lad, Thane, and Smith. Finally Rig arrives at a large hall where Father (Faðir) and Mother (Móðir) live. There the austere householder is sitting making bows and arrows. His wife is dressed in expensive clothes and her neck is white as snow. Rig shares a bed with this couple too. Nine months Mother gives birth to a son named Lord (Jarl):

had him named Lord;
blond was his hair, bright his cheeks,
piercing were his eyes like a young snake's.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Saxo, 2.2.5.

¹¹⁹ *Rígsþula* is preserved only in *The Poetic Edda*. The dating of the poem is controversial. Some scholars think that it comes from the Viking Age while others claim that it was composed in the High Middle Ages. There is also dispute as to whether it originated in Norway, Iceland, Denmark, or even Britain. What is clear, however, is that neither churchmen nor burghers are mentioned in the poem. KLNLM: "Rígsþula"; B. & P. Sawyer, 1993, pp. 142 f.; S. Bagge, 2000, pp. 21–38.

¹²⁰ *The List of Rig (The Poetic Edda)*, 8.239. *Rígsþula*: *Rígsþula*, verse 8. <http://etext.old.no/Bugge/rigstula.html>.

¹²¹ *The List of Rig*, 34.242. *Rígsþula*, verse 34: *bleikt var hár, biartir vangar, ötul vóru augu sem yrmli*. The piercing eyes as a sign of aristocratic origin may be influenced by Christian tradition. The last book in the New Testament, Revelation, describes one of the four

When Jarl grown up he learns the art of war by mastering horse, bow, and sword to perfection. Rig visits Jarl when he is an adult and initiates him in the mystery of the runes. He calls him his son and asks Jarl to take possession of ancestral plains. Jarl obeys his father's advice by conquering land with sword in hand. He then starts a family and has many children, one of them called "young Kon", *Konr ungr* (a play on *konungr* "king"). This son has a sophisticated intellect, surpassing his father in cunning and rune-lore. He understands the birds' speech and heeds their advice to conquer the kingdom of the Danes.¹²² *Konr ungr* personifies the perfect ruler since he inherits the name Rig which corresponds to the title of king.

The poem thus demonstrates how the aristocracy is distanced from other groups in society. They have innate qualities and are predestined to wage war and govern. The author employs patriarchal terminology – Father and Mother – to show the established hierarchy. The aristocracy possesses a unique charisma through its vigour and its spiritual ties to the gods.¹²³ It is only Jarl that Rig calls his son, and it is only Jarl who has an intellectual education as his father has taught him the runes.¹²⁴ The aristocracy was thus a group chosen by the gods.¹²⁵ When the author of *Rígsþula* describes this family, yet another generation is added, unlike the two other groups. This reveals their role as founders of royal dynasties, as symbolized by Jarl's son *Konr ungr*.

horsemen of the apocalypse, the man on the white horse, in the words: "His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. [...] On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords". *The Holy Bible: New Testament: Book of Revelation*, 19.12, 19.16.

¹²² *The List of Rig*, 46–48.244. *Rígsþula*, verses 48, 49. The poem ends abruptly after the advice of the birds, but it seems highly likely that *Konr ungr*/Rig follows their counsel. According to the lost *Skjöldunga saga*, King Rig then married Dana and together they had a son named Dan who, according to the myth, was the king who united the Danish realm. L.M. Hollander, note 42, <http://home.earthlink.net/~wodensharrow/rigsthula.html>. Saxo builds on the myth of Dan in *Gesta Danorum*.

¹²³ Pre-Christian elements are thus used here to construct a tradition intended to legitimize the position of the aristocracy in society.

¹²⁴ It is a fact, however, that Thrall and Karl were also descended from the gods through their father Rig. In Norse society it was common for the master of the household to have children by his slave women. It was then up to him if he wanted to acknowledge the child and give it free status. The child's position in society was thus a result of the father's choice. In *Rígsþula* all the groups in society are of divine origin, but the differences between the groups are determined by the gods. S. Bagge, 2000, p. 33, S. Bagge, 2001, pp. 267 f.

¹²⁵ In the Norwegian skaldic poem *Háleygjatal* the poet Eyvindr Skáldaspillir claims that the lineage of the jarls of Hlaðir (Lade) could be traced back to Odin. *Skjld*, A 1, pp. 68 ff.; B 1, pp. 60 ff. The poem is believed to have been composed at the end of the tenth century.

4.4 *The Social Environment*

The intellectual discourse of friendship could be found, for instance, at the aristocratic courts. Western Europe had seen the rise of a courtly ideal that hailed friendship and love. This tradition, according to Stephen Jaeger, can be traced back to the tenth-century Ottonian courtly culture. He criticizes scholars who believe that the praise of courtly love was a phenomenon that mainly arose in the twelfth century. Instead Jaeger emphasizes the continuity by pointing out two constant characteristics: "Two features are central to that continuity: love as a school of manners and virtue; and love as a 'magnifying', exalting, and prestige-giving force".¹²⁶ Instead he interprets the twelfth-century infatuation with friendship and love as a way to revive a dying ideal. The innovation would have been that the twelfth-century courtly love included love between woman and man, whereas the older tradition concerned only love and friendship between men. To understand this older view, we must look more closely at the social environment of the secular aristocrats.

Like the ecclesiastical elite, many members of the warrior caste lived in a strictly homosocial environment.¹²⁷ This was particularly characteristic of the landless knights who had not formed a family because of the inheritance system.¹²⁸ In some contexts, then, bonds of kinship were subordinate to other kinds of liaisons. The warriors displayed a group culture with a collective military identity. They were often separated from their families as children, and it was the duty of the foster-families to provide the boys with a military education. A common term for youths who had grown up together was *nurri*, which meant that they belonged to the same household.¹²⁹ They were often fostered by one or more selected masters whom the Latin sources call *tutores*, *paedagogi*, or *nutrici*. This education included instruction in the use of weapons and learning *mores*, that is, the art of behaving in public. The masters also had to act as the boys' protectors.¹³⁰ The military instruction included several

¹²⁶ C.S. Jaeger, 1999, p. 82.

¹²⁷ On homosociality and intimate bonds of friendship at the court of Charles the Good, see B. Demyttenaere, 2009, p. 155; 164–168.

¹²⁸ The switch to an agnatic kinship system had the result that the eldest son was favoured to prevent an inheritance from being divided.

¹²⁹ M. Bennet, 1999, p. 73. William the Bastard claimed that he had been brought up in the use of arms since childhood. E. Searle, 1988, p. 193.

¹³⁰ Dudo of St Quentin tells how Rollo had one of his followers named Botho bring up Richard I. He gave him several guards. A young man named Osmund was Richard's closest guardian (*tutor*). Dudo, 4.67.96, 4.73.104, 3.36.57. Saxo Grammaticus writes that the Danish king Niels's firstborn son Inge was killed as a child when his *paedagogus* was teaching him to ride. Saxo, 13.1.3. Valdemar I, according to the same author, had his foster-son Christoffer reared by a *paedagogus* named Peder and a person named Selgret. They were supposed

dangerous elements, with hunting being one of the first tests of manhood. This means that the nobles had been welded together from an early age, forming small groups where friendship played a prominent role. In medieval society, wealth and power could only be inherited to a limited extent. A young aristocrat therefore had to display martial vigour in order to acquire the charisma and reputation required to assert himself on the political stage of a feuding society. He was thus, like Jarl in *Rígsþula*, forced to honour his father's name by defending and conquering land, with sword in hand, for himself and his followers. Violence and conflicts thus often provided the foundation for an aristocrat's position, but it was important to steer the feuds in the right direction.

The military group culture subsequently set its stamp on the adult warriors' lives. Hincmar of Reims (806–882) writes that the Norsemen's forces were organized as a large number of small bands which appeared to be more or less independent of each other.¹³¹ Their descendants, the Normans, had a similar military culture. The elite forces in the Norman army consisted of small fighting units held together by bonds of kinship and friendship.¹³² These groups had been hand-picked and put together when the warriors were young boys, after which they had been trained to become efficient fighting forces held together by powerful internal solidarity. The Norman armed fraternities were therefore sought after as elite soldiers in much of Europe and in Constantinople. Similar military bands of kinsmen and friends also existed in Scandinavia.¹³³ Besides the kin-based warrior collectives, the medieval sources mention other forms of cooperative groups such as military brotherhoods. These associations were not based on kinship. Instead they were bound together by oaths and laws. In the era of the crusades the brotherhoods developed into clerical communities such as the Knights Hospitaller and the Knights Templar, inspired by the rule of monastic orders. A Nordic counterpart to these orders may have been the Guilds of St Knud (see Chapter 4). During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the military brotherhoods were idealized in secular literature by being given a foundation in the heroic past. This period is often portrayed as the golden

to teach the youth to behave in a "dignified and courteous" manner. Saxo, 14.34.3, 14.16.7. Absalon's brothers and cousins act as Christoffer's protectors when they are campaigning. Saxo, 14.40.5.

131 E. Searle, 1988, p. 36.

132 E. Searle, 1988, p. 167.

133 For Denmark, see L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 88, 115. For Iceland, see Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1993.

age of the virtuous, fitted to serve as a moral example to the contemporary aristocracy.

One example is the legendary brotherhood of *Jómsvíkinga saga*.¹³⁴ These warriors had their base in the Norse enclave of Jomsborg, which was a feudal garrison in the territory of the Polish ruler Boleslaw on the south coast of the Baltic Sea. The saga tells how their chieftain Palnatoki compiled laws to create order and strengthen the inner cohesion of the brotherhood. The warriors were forced to renounce all kinship-based bonds of loyalty. They had to remain bachelors as all permanent relations with women were prohibited. The only personal tie of significance was the powerful bond between the brothers. If a warrior was killed, the others were obliged to take blood vengeance.¹³⁵ If anyone broke the strict rules he was immediately expelled or severely punished.

The ideology of the military brotherhood enjoyed a great upswing particularly in the twelfth century, which can be explained in part as a consequence of the crusading spirit. Another reason may have been that the ideology was a response to the clerical peace movement that sought to uphold the rule of law and the sacral order. By asserting the strict rules of the brotherhoods and the passion for justice, the secular aristocracy displayed its traditional ability to maintain social order.¹³⁶ These associations also represented an ideology of peace that sought to maintain peace within the communities and to establish the Christian peace (*pax*) with sword in hand.¹³⁷ The brotherhood thus constituted examples of the righteous lifestyle of the aristocracy, where peace, justice, and friendship were characteristics of the high morality of the warrior caste.¹³⁸ The mythologizing of these communities in the written sources can thus be interpreted as an intellectual legitimation strategy.

¹³⁴ See B. Bandlien, 2006, pp. 183–200. Bandlien also examines the brotherhood of the St Olav warriors who are mentioned in the Norwegian *Legendariske saga* (c. 1200) which is about Saint Olav. B. Bandlien, 2006, pp. 191 ff. The Icelandic *Jómsvíkinga saga* is dated to the thirteenth century, but Bandlien points out that there is a great deal to suggest that the myth was known throughout the North in the twelfth century. B. Bandlien, 2006, p. 186.

¹³⁵ *Jómsvíkinga saga*, pp. 129 f.

¹³⁶ However in contemporary sources such as Galbert of Bruges's *De multro* this role is sometimes (in implicit terms) criticized and ridiculed, see: R.M. Stein, 2009, pp. 200–214.

¹³⁷ The ancient brotherhoods in medieval literature were not just mythical. There is much to indicate that this was a common form of organization in the old medieval and pre-Christian warrior culture. See e.g. J. Lind, 2006, pp. 143–182.

¹³⁸ Parallel to these collectives we also find more pair-related brotherhoods such as companionship in the form of “weapon brothers” or “stable brothers”. In the Latin sources these are called *collegae*, *socii*, or *contubernii*. These companionships were portrayed in

This homosocial group culture can therefore explain why the praise of friendship and love between aristocratic men had such a prominent position in secular literature.¹³⁹ In this connection women were a threat to male community.¹⁴⁰ In *Jómsvíkinga saga* the warriors had to take an oath where they pledged not to enter into any permanent liaison with women. Saxo Grammaticus likewise stresses repeatedly that the young, unmarried warriors were the toughest and boldest fighters on the battlefield. The ideal warrior was thus a man who was independent of women, who were associated with the home and the household, that is to say, an environment far removed from the glorious life of a warrior.¹⁴¹ Aristocratic men were brought up and thus spent a considerable part of their lives in strictly homosocial settings. Cohesion within these groups probably played an important role in creating an aristocratic self-awareness. Like the ecclesiastical elite, they acted in single-sex environments, and like the clerics they therefore idealized the bonds of friendship.¹⁴²

4.5 *The Court as a Political Arena*

The aristocratic identity was thus reinforced within its own community, but at the same time the magnates' status and political position was heavily dependent on the vertical ties to princely families. Relations with the king were often described in terms of friendship. The concept of *amicitia* had been used

medieval literature as an ideal for friendship and love between virtuous men. The poem *Ami et Amile* has been called the first secular medieval poem about friendship. It is about the friendship and love between the companions Roland and Oliver. M. Bennet, 1999, p. 84. For "stable brotherhood" as an ideal see P. Reinholdsson, 1998, p. 231. See also Reinholdsson on customary law and the concept of *frid*, meaning "peace" but originally "love", P. Reinholdsson, 1998, pp. 128 ff.; 147 ff.

139 This literature was primarily intended for an audience consisting of men.

140 Reginald Hyatte considers how chivalrous love between men, *amitié*, in the poem *Ami et Amile* is contrasted with women's love, which is regarded as having a negative moral effect. R. Hyatte, 1994, pp. 121–135. On bonds of friendship between men and women, see e.g. M.T. Clanchy, 1997; B. Wheeler (ed.), 2000.

141 According to C.S. Jaeger, it was not until the High Middle Ages that a courtly culture arose where troubadours and poets sang the praises of love for a woman. C.S. Jaeger, 1999. In most cases it was probably a new strategy for the men to gain personal influence and status at court.

142 The idealization of friendship in homosocial settings is, of course, not bound to any particular time or place. On homosociality and the significance of same-sex friendships for identity-creating processes, see e.g. H. Brod & M. Kaufman, 1994; R. Connell, 1995; F. Ambjörnsson, 2004.

frequently since the Middle Ages to describe the relationship between the king and his confidants. The designation was often used as a synonym for *beneficium*. The king's friendship was regarded as a gift in a reciprocal exchange where the magnates obtained advantages and rewards in return for their military support.¹⁴³ The prince's favour and friendship were essential for pursuing a career in the political arena.¹⁴⁴ The court was regarded as a *familia* (household) where the bonds between the king and his loyal supporters were described in terms of love and friendship such as *familiaritas*, *amicitia*, *amor*, and *carietas*.¹⁴⁵ The king's personal preferences played an important part in this, and thus emotions and politics were intimately associated.¹⁴⁶ Enjoying the favour and friendship of the prince was never a permanent privilege that guaranteed the magnates a place in the inner circle.¹⁴⁷ The friendship could be quickly lost if they fell into disfavour and incurred the king's wrath, *ira regis*, which could be disastrous for a person's career.¹⁴⁸

The friendship of the aristocracy with the king was not only of pragmatic significance, however; it also played an ideological role. German scholars such as Gerd Tellenbach and Karl Schmid have emphasized the symbolic significance of *Königsnähe* (nearness to the king). Magnates who were linked to the prince's inner circle through bonds of kinship or friendship could share the royal charisma through the noble refulgence reflecting on their families.¹⁴⁹ A Nordic example is the Danish earl Erik who married Cecilia, daughter of King Knud (Canute) the Holy (r. 1080–1086). Saxo Grammaticus writes that "from these a large number of descendants arose, linked together as eminent representatives of a distinguished family line".¹⁵⁰ Denmark's foremost aristocratic network, the Skjalm clan, could claim kinship with the royal family because

143 On *amicitia* as a synonym for *beneficium*, see B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. 92.

144 On the significance of the concept of grace (*huld*) in medieval political culture, see G. Althoff, 1997, pp. 199–228.

145 See G. Althoff, 1990, pp. 88–119.

146 R.E. Barton, 1998, pp. 153–170.

147 The magnates often appear to have competed to see who was closest in favour to the king. *Baglersaga* states that a man named Pål Drottsete was closest to the Norwegian king Inge. The saga tells of how the king and Pål slept in the same bed. *Baglersaga*, p. 344.

148 G. Althoff, 1998, pp. 59–74. For Scandinavia, see H.J. Orning, 2008, pp. 168–185, 315–318.

149 K. Schmid, 1979, pp. 50 ff.; G. Tellenbach, 1979, 204 ff. Tellenbach explains the mutual dependence between the crown and the aristocracy by quoting A. Gurevich: "No nobility without a king, no king without a nobility", G. Tellenbach, 1979, p. 206.

150 Saxo, 11.14.16. Cecilia was the sister of Count Charles of Flanders, who was worshiped as a saint. Cecilia's mother, Adele, was believed to be descended from the Carolingians.

Archbishop Absalon's mother Inga is said to have been the daughter of Erik and Cecilia.¹⁵¹ *Königsnähe* was often established through marriage with women from the royal family, and a way of marking royal descent was therefore to use a matronymic.¹⁵² In Sweden *Königsnähe* appears to have been a necessary condition for bearing the title of jarl. The Swedish jarl Birger Brosa (jarl 1174–1202) also claimed descent from Knud the Holy through his paternal grandfather Folke, who was married to Knud's second daughter Ingegerd.¹⁵³

Families in the high aristocracy tried by every means to safeguard their royal blood so that they could distinguish themselves as a specific group of greater nobility than other magnates. This charisma was preserved from generation to generation, regardless of whether they had close ties to the reigning royal family or not. The magnates thus strove to stand out as an imperial aristocracy.¹⁵⁴ As we have noted, however, the groups around the king were in constant transformation. The royal court was an arena where different actors competed for a share of the prince's favour and to enjoy the confidence of belonging to his circle of advisors.¹⁵⁵

During the twelfth century this political arena was filled with a tension between two divergent power strategies: On the one hand, the king's endeavour to control his subjects by selectively apportioning or withdrawing the coveted favour. On the other hand, the magnates' efforts to consolidate their positions. Favour meant that the prince could choose his friends arbitrarily, which was a constant threat to the aristocracy. The magnates constantly had to defend their places in the government of the realm. They were forced to try different methods to legitimize their membership of the inner circle, while simultaneously working to exclude new actors from the field.¹⁵⁶ Here they could use rational means such as privileges and rights or references to tradition. Ultimately,

151 L. Hermanson, 2000, p. 146.

152 L. Hermanson, 2000, p. 154.

153 Folke and Ingegerd are said to have had a son named Arnold, who is mentioned in the chronicle of Galbert of Bruges as pretender to the County of Flanders after the murder of his uncle Charles the Good. J. Gallén, 1985, p. 64.

154 An "imperial aristocracy" is of course a modern term that has been used above all in German research (*Reichsaristokratie*). The medieval sources used a number of different Latin formulae to denote "the chief men in the realm", such as *principes regni*, *regni primates*, *primores regni*, *meliores regni*, and *sapientes*.

155 Then there were, of course, a considerable number of magnates who did not want to have anything to do with the king, as they sought to avoid his interference in their local power spheres. They could nevertheless acknowledge his supremacy through different types of situationally determined symbolic subordination rituals. See contextual loyalty in H.J. Orning, 2008, pp. 155–192.

156 Ecclesiastical dignitaries also took part in this game.

however, it was the question of who represented the king's "true friends" that determined the outcome. Here the ideology of friendship and the ethics of virtue played a prominent part. False friends were those who did not act for the good of society, instead working in their own interests. Other examples of false friends were the cowards who did not stand by the king in times of need, or the traitors who conspired against his life.

In medieval literature the relationship between the king and his advisors is a recurrent theme. The Carolingian era saw the development of a literary genre called the *speculum* – the prince's mirror. This was a kind of didactic handbook intended to guide princes in their exercise of power. The prince's mirror enjoyed a renaissance in the latter part of the twelfth century. These books were usually about the ideal Christian ruler who listened to the advice of his wise counsellors.¹⁵⁷ A leitmotif was princes who had strayed from the path of virtue and therefore risked becoming tyrants. The counsellors' task was to lead the prince back on the right path through candid reprimands.¹⁵⁸ Many authors of princes' mirrors represented the church's view; John of Salisbury is an example. It is difficult, however, to draw clear dividing lines. The majority of the medieval authors combined Christian ethics with classical ideals, irrespective of whether they belonged to the secular or the ecclesiastical category. In keeping with Cicero's political ideology, the king and his friends the counsellors were supposed to incite each other in virtue as a way to act in the best interests of society. For this they had to demonstrate how bonds of true friendship were more than mere pragmatic ties. This could be proved by emphasizing their spiritual meaning and their societal dimension.

The authors often enlisted tradition to give legitimacy. An example of an intellectual representative of the secular aristocracy was the Danish author and royal retainer Svend Aggesen. He was active in the courtly environment of Valdemar I, where in the 1180s he composed a law for the royal household, *Vederloven*, in its Latin version called *Lex Castrensis*. In this work it is "men in olden times" who are the bearers of eternal virtues. Aggesen gives his Law of the Retainers a historical foundation by referring in the preface to an original that is said to have been issued by Canute the Great (r. 1016–1035). That king is said to have wanted to create a hierarchical order in his socially and ethnically heterogeneous army by dividing the warriors according to their merits and virtues. Those who had displayed extraordinary virtues were granted the favour of belonging to the king's closest circle. The author writes that Canute sought to attach the country's rich magnates to him "so that those who came from

¹⁵⁷ J. Canning, 1996, p. 47.

¹⁵⁸ See e.g. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, Chapter 6, p. 70.

distinguished lineages would excel each other in virtue".¹⁵⁹ The king therefore formed an exclusive retinue in which the warriors were united in "fraternal love" under a common herd law.¹⁶⁰ Canute the Great proclaimed that

only those men who honoured the king and adorned the force of warriors by shining resplendent with gilded axeheads and sword-hilts were to approach the clement king with the privilege of a closer association.¹⁶¹

The aim of Svend Aggesen's Law of the Retainers was probably to enhance the value of serving the king. At the same time we see how the author singles out an exclusive group in society whose virtues qualified them to belong to the circle around the king. This was a way to distinguish them from other armed groups lower down in the hierarchy. Svend has been interpreted in research as an enthusiastic advocate of the sovereign Valdemarian royal power. His law, however, shows that the author represents the view that the high aristocracy should be among the king's closest confidants. Their prominent position in the government of the kingdom is legitimized through ancient tradition, since they had been an exclusive stratum in society ever since the time of Canute the Great.

Svend Aggesen also wrote a short history, *Brevis Historia*, of the exploits of the Danish kings. In this text he tells us that his colleague, *contubernalis*, Saxo is simultaneously working on a larger history written in "more elegant style".¹⁶² Svend is referring here to Saxo Grammaticus, who completed his epic *Gesta Danorum* a few decades later. What Saxo and Svend had in common was that they belonged to the warrior caste since the heads of their respective families (Saxo's grandfather, Svend's father) had fought in the armed retinues of Danish kings. Saxo, however, represented a far more sophisticated political ideology according to which the bond of friendship symbolized an idea of consensus, that the king, the church, and the aristocracy should work together for the good of society. *Gesta Danorum* is an example of how friendship was a constituent element of society not just for the clerical elite but also for the secular aristocracy. Let us therefore explore in greater depth the role played by friendship and love in Saxo's political ideology.

159 Svend Aggesen, *Lex Castrensis*, 1.32.

160 Svend Aggesen, *Lex Castrensis*, Preface 31, 4.34.

161 Svend Aggesen, *Lex Castrensis*, 2.32.

162 Svend Aggesen, *Lex Castrensis*, 10.64. On the meaning of the designation *contubernalis*, see Eric Christiansen's introduction to the translation of Svend Aggesen's work, pp. 2 ff.

5 Friendship and the Legitimation of Power in Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*

Gesta Danorum must be regarded as one of the most significant historical works from the Scandinavian High Middle Ages. Only the Icelandic author Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* can match it in scope and detail. *Gesta Danorum*, which was written between 1185 and 1208, describes the exploits of the Danish people from the remotest past to the beginning of the reign of Knud VI, i.e. until 1185.¹⁶³ Saxo Grammaticus sought to show that Denmark was not inferior in antiquity and reputation to contemporary "civilized" principalities such as the Holy Roman Empire. Like the Frankish and German historians, he took the ancient Roman Empire as a model. By employing a highly sophisticated language, the extinct Latin of the Silver Age, he wished to demonstrate that the glorious history and culture of the Danish people were fully comparable to anything the Romans could boast.¹⁶⁴

The history has been interpreted in earlier research as a work of propaganda for the Valdemarian kings. Its chief purpose was to legitimize hierarchical royal government based on vertical bonds with the aristocracy. Within this hierarchy the magnates were forced to subjugate themselves to the crown, as represented by Valdemar I (r. 1157–82) and his son Knud VI (1182–1202).¹⁶⁵ This view has however been questioned by Swedish scholars such as Kurt Johansson, Birgit Sawyer, and myself.¹⁶⁶ In the following I therefore put forward an interpretation based on an analysis of how Saxo describes the political interaction between the kings and the aristocracy. The thesis is that he strove to legitimize an exercise of power whereby the king collaborates with a specific aristocratic network that will here be called the *Skjalme clan*. The fundamental element in Saxo's idea of consensus was the bond of friendship between kings and magnates.

Gesta Danorum is treated in this context as a relic of the intellectual world of the late twelfth and early thirteenth century. Saxo was a typical representative of the twelfth-century renaissance, which means that his perception of the role of friendship in politics is based in large measure on the friendship ideal of the classical Roman thinkers and the Christian writers of late antiquity. These serve as models in the author's legitimation project. I proceed from the premise

163 No medieval manuscript of the entire *Gesta Danorum* have been preserved. The only complete text is a printed edition that was published in Paris in 1514.

164 The "Silver Age" in Roman literature refers to the first two centuries of the empire. Some representatives are Valerius Maximus, Seneca, Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, and Juvenal.

165 L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 15–21.

166 K. Johannesson, 1978; B. Sawyer, 1985, pp. 33–60; L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 189–209, 246 ff.

that he uses the ideology of friendship in his interpretation and description of the political arena of the elite, where different aristocratic networks competed for the favour of kings in order to obtain influence in the government of the realm. The virtues of friendship thus represent an ideal intended to show which magnates were the king's best partners in collaboration, by possessing specific ennobling qualities such as loyalty, vigour, and wisdom.¹⁶⁷

Gesta Danorum consists of sixteen books. This analysis comprises the periods 1047–1074 and 1146–1182 which are covered in books eleven, fourteen, and fifteen. The focus is on the friendship between the Danish king Svend Estridsen and the bishop William of Roskilde, which is compared with the description of the friendship between King Valdemar I and Bishop Absalon. The aim is to clarify how the author legitimizes power against the background of the ideologies, norms, and values governing his perception of friendship. The problem will be elucidated through a study of two basic forms of friendship: spiritual friendship and pragmatic political friendship. As noted before, research often draws a sharp dividing line between the two expressions of friendship. In a Nordic context it is almost only pragmatic friendship that has been analysed in detail.¹⁶⁸ Here, however, I want to show how Saxo manages to combine the pragmatic view of friendship in Scandinavian political culture with classical and Christian philosophical theories about the noble essence of spiritual friendship. *Gesta Danorum* thus fills a function as a cultural manifestation of power against rival elite groups and new royal ideologies of lordship, and therefore it can be interpreted as a contribution to the intellectual debate.

5.1 *Saxo's Classical View of History*

For deeper insight into Saxo's view of friendship we must first place the author in a social, cultural, and political context. We have very little information about him as a person.¹⁶⁹ We do know that Saxo was an aristocrat who was familiar both with the intellectual world of the clerical elite and with the secular culture of the court and the warrior sector. His sophisticated language

167 On ennobling virtues, see C.S. Jaeger, 1999, p. 311.

168 For Norway and Iceland, see e.g. J.L. Byock, 1988; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1995, pp. 311–330; G. Høgseth, 1995. For Denmark, see L. Hermanson, 2000.

169 See e.g. K. Friis Jensen, 1989, pp. 331–357. It is possible that he belonged to the lower aristocracy. In the first books of *Gesta Danorum* in particular, dealing with ancient times, the author expresses an antipathy for the aristocracy of birth with their rich estates. Noble character, according to Saxo, is acquired through great deeds, not through inheritance. Saxo, 1.8.25, 4.3.9, 5.5.5. Perhaps this is also a way for the author to raise a warning finger against the degeneration of the royal family to which hereditary royal succession can lead.

reflects an education acquired abroad, probably at one of the leading seats of learning in northern France. The author's own person is an illustrative example of the difficulty of categorizing the intellectuals of the time as belonging to either the ecclesiastical or the secular elite. There is debate as to whether Saxo was a churchman or not. This is not so important in this context, however, since he chiefly emphasizes collaboration between the crown and the aristocracy. For this he does not distinguish any specific clerical aristocracy. Saxo was commissioned to compose his work by Archbishop Absalon, who belonged to one of the country's most influential aristocratic networks, the Skjalm clan. He is portrayed as a hero in *Gesta Danorum*, but so too is his brother, the magnate and knight Esbern Snare. Let us simply proceed from the fact that Saxo was a *grammaticus* and thus belonged to Europe's intellectual elite.

It was the property of being one of Denmark's few *grammatici* that qualified him to work at the court of Absalon (archbishop 1178–1201). Absalon died before Saxo had finished his history, and therefore the author in his preface dedicates the work to Absalon's successor as archbishop, Andreas Sunesen. Absalon and Andreas Sunesen were along the most prominent individuals in the Skjalm group. It was Absalon who took the initiative to commission *Gesta Danorum* and he was one of Saxo's main sources.¹⁷⁰ Andreas Sunesen, in his role as the author's patron, must have exerted considerable influence on the work as well. These powerful men no doubt wanted *Gesta Danorum* as a kind of symbolic capital to mark their positions in the intellectual sphere. The history of Denmark in the twelfth century is therefore presented from the perspective of the Skjalm clan.

Saxo was working in the literary environment created around the archiepiscopal see in Lund,¹⁷¹ where Norse and European culture met. This meant that *Gesta Danorum* was created through a cross-fertilization of the Norse oral narrative tradition and medieval European written culture. The author was probably influenced by contemporary German and English historians such as Helmold of Bosau, Otto of Freising, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury, John of Salisbury, and Orderic Vitalis. In his preface Saxo also expressly states that he has used "the diligence of the men of Iceland".¹⁷²

170 However, from c. 1158 onwards, Saxo's chronology seems to be based on extensive research in the royal archives. M.H. Gelting, 2012, pp. 322–345.

171 K. Friis Jensen, 1989, pp. 331–357.

172 Saxo, Preface, 1.4.

The author's primary stylistic models, however, were classical authors. His veneration of Roman literature is clear already in the preface.¹⁷³ Like his contemporary European colleagues he represented a classical view of history, which meant that history was used to illuminate eternal truths about human properties such as different virtues and vices.¹⁷⁴ This outlook was integrated with the Christian tradition whereby the account is coloured by the history of salvation and the Christian virtues, *sacrae virtutes*. The authors of the twelfth-century renaissance regarded the classical Greco-Roman era as a golden age and an example for contemporary morality and politics. In *Gesta Danorum* the history of the Danish people is thus interpreted according to a classical template. The actors' political actions are evaluated against the background of the Roman ethics represented by writers like Cicero and Seneca. History therefore serves as a rational doctrine of right and wrong.

Through the use of various *exempla* Saxo lets his heroes embody Roman virtues (*exempla virtutis*) such as courage, wisdom, eloquence, and justice, while the rogues of history represent classical vices such as pride, avarice, gluttony, or cowardice.¹⁷⁵ In his endeavour to show that the history of the Danish people was at least as glorious as that of the Holy Roman Empire, he clothes his history in classical language shaped by the authors of the imperial era, such as Valerius Maximus, Livy, Curtius Rufus, Justinus, and poets like Virgil and Horace. Denmark is portrayed as a Roman empire and described in social and political terminology borrowed from classical antiquity.¹⁷⁶

Saxo was probably influenced by Cicero's *De Officiis* and its supplement *De Amicitia*, and the tradition of medieval moral treatises and princes' mirrors inspired by these works.¹⁷⁷ This literature aimed to guide princes in their exercise of power. It was exceedingly important for the king to listen to the right advisors. This is a leitmotif in Saxo's fourteenth and fifteenth books. Here the king's advisors, *consilarii*, play a prominent role. Through different *exempla*

173 The author claims that the Danes, "filled with a desire to echo the glory when notable braveries had been performed, alluded in the Roman manner to the splendour of their nobly-wrought achievements" in poetical composition, and "engraved the letters of their own language on rocks and stones". Saxo, Preface, 1.3.

174 M. Carruthers writes that in the medieval outlook there was a close association between the terms "author" and "authority", "an author is simply one whose writings are full of authorities". M. Carruthers, 2008 (1st ed. 1990), p. 236. For a medieval writer it was therefore natural to imitate earlier masters. This was a cultural strategy that strengthened the author's symbolic capital in the intellectual field.

175 K. Johannesson, 1978, pp. 20–29.

176 E. Christiansen, 1980–1981, pp. 685, pp. 695 ff.

177 K. Johannesson, 1978, p. 30. We do not know whether Saxo was directly or indirectly influenced by Cicero.

the author demonstrates which groups the king ought to rely on and which to ignore. There is no doubt which group represents the wisest counsellors: the king's friends in the Skjalm collective. These had the prime virtue of an advisor, *prudentia*, which meant that their wisdom endowed them with the ability to foresee the future and give the prince advice about the right decisions to make.¹⁷⁸

With the basic ideas of the friendship ideology, Saxo wanted to present an ideal model for lordship, to be followed by princes in his time and in the future. The virtues of friendship simultaneously have a legitimizing function. During the period when Saxo composed his work, it could not be taken for granted that members of the Skjalm clan would belong to the inner circle of kings Knud VI and Valdemar II (r. 1202–41). Their prominent positions were constantly threatened and questioned by rival aristocratic networks. Since friendship in the classical and medieval periods represented an ideal of righteousness, Saxo could exploit the ideology of friendship to legitimize the prominent status of this group in the Danish realm.¹⁷⁹ A king who took advice from his true friends in the elite thus became a *rex iustus*, unlike a king who rejected the advice of good aristocratic friends and thus represented a *rex tyrannus*. The author's last books can thus be regarded as a project to legitimize the leading position of a specific elite collective in Danish society.

5.2 *The Audience of Gesta Danorum*

Saxo was probably addressing a small circle of magnates connected to the princely court, men capable of assimilating the political message. The author's ideal of friendship can thus be viewed as a form of esotericism – a social code – intended to be understood by a select few. The virtues of friendship thus functioned as exclusive status markers with the purpose of distancing an aristocratic network from its rivals.¹⁸⁰ The ability to practise true friendship was thus a property that separated the wheat from the chaff. Consequently, the virtues of friendship were also a way to create a group identity by serving as an aristocratic self-manifestation.

Like Cicero's *De Officiis* and *De Amicitia*, several episodes in *Gesta Danorum* are probably intended to serve as a political handbook for rulers in contemporary and future Denmark. Yet it must have been a very small circle of intellectuals who possessed the knowledge required to understand the many messages that can be read implicitly and between the lines. The author employs a complex

¹⁷⁸ K. Johannesson, 1978, p. 29.

¹⁷⁹ On friendship as an ideal of virtue, see J. McEvoy, 1999, p. 14.

¹⁸⁰ On the aristocracy's use of social markers, see T. Reuter, 2000, pp. 85–98.

literary technique in that he writes on several different levels, presents contrasts, posits theses and antitheses, and makes frequent use of parallelisms. To appreciate to the full this more or less concealed information one must read all sixteen books in the history, and it is pretty certain that very few people were able to do so. The readers could be found at the Danish bishops' courts and the royal court, but not even this audience could have had the education needed to understand *Gesta Danorum* at the deep level the author wished to convey.

Presumably the aim was that the story of the great deeds of the Danish people would be spread to a European audience, but it was not until the sixteenth century that the book attracted international attention. Another purpose may have been to demonstrate cultural power against the increased foreign influence at the royal court and in the administration. By showing the high degree of education and civilization of the Danish aristocracy, Saxo sought to prevent kings like Knud VI and Valdemar II, and probably also ecclesiastical dignitaries, from admitting foreigners to their service. *Gesta Danorum* was thus a way to demonstrate how the close contacts and affinity of the Danish elite with European intellectual networks, and the author wished to mark the position of the Danish aristocracy in the intellectual sphere. Saxo stresses in his preface that the Danes had recently learned the art of writing and the Latin language. It thus seems likely that he also wrote his history for a future well-educated Danish elite who could read the entire work without any difficulty.

The usual way for a thirteenth-century audience to assimilate the contents of books was by reading aloud or memorizing text.¹⁸¹ It was then up to the person reading aloud to decide which parts would be read, and he then was probably free to adapt the reading to suit the listeners. One of the most important social markers of the elite was speech.¹⁸² A professionally performed reading of a sophisticated text like Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* must have made a strong impression on the listeners. The heroes in the book were thus framed in a linguistic aura which granted them a special charisma, unattainable to the vast majority. A reading performance of this kind may thus have functioned as an esoteric demonstration, which the reciter could choose to shape and translate in different ways depending on the group of people who were listening.

Saxo's pronounced classicism raises the question of the extent to which the source can provide a knowledge of the norms, values, and ideals that characterized the Danish elite's outlook on friendship. What can be interpreted as literary construction, theory, and ideology, and what was actual political

181 L. Boje Mortensen, 2000, p. 150. On reading aloud to an audience and memorizing text, see also M.J. Carruthers, 2008 (1st ed. 1990), pp. 195 ff., 225 ff.

182 T. Reuter, 2000, p. 90.

practice? How far can *Gesta Danorum* be generalized? There is a possibility that the author merely presents ancient European ideals of friendship which were alien to Scandinavian political culture. If so, he was primarily conveying a European intellectual philosophy rather than a Scandinavian political culture. It is impossible to give a satisfactory answer. In view of Saxo's familiarity with the Norse narrative tradition and his ambition to create a synthesis of classical and Norse, however, it appears likely that the Scandinavian audience was familiar with Saxo's ideal of friendship. Distinct parallels can be demonstrated, for example, between the role of friendship in the Norwegian-Icelandic source material and the function of friendship in *Gesta Danorum*. We can therefore assume that the indigenous audience was not totally alien to the author's Roman concept of friendship. Ideologies must always interplay with the existing norms, expectations, and beliefs of society, so we may assume that Saxo was not speaking to deaf ears. He probably proceeded from an existing culture and transformed it for a broader intellectual context.

5.3 *The Spiritual Friendship between Bishop William and Svend Estridsen*

The bond of friendship was just one of several different types of personal ties by which the Danish kings were related to the aristocracy. Yet Saxo tries to ascribe a special dignity to friendship, the noble essence of which is valued more highly than other types of relations. In *Gesta Danorum* friendship is the strongest bond, serving as an ideal for political collaboration.¹⁸³ This finds expression, above all, in the author's description of the relationship between the founder of the dynasty, Svend Estridsen (r. c. 1047–1076) and Bishop William of Roskilde (c. 1057–1072/76).

William is stated to be the closest of the king's friends. Their friendship was based on profound mutual respect. Saxo writes that the king showed devotion and reverence to the bishop, which William repaid with "unique loyalty". The author asserts that "These were the men of integrity whom the sovereign trusted to have close at his side as his most reliable servants".¹⁸⁴ The bishop, however, not only had the role of the king's right hand and trusted companion, but also acted as Svend's severe advisor, who did not hesitate to reprimand his friend when he acted improperly. Bishop William thereby incarnated justice (*iustitia*) and the king, on account of his profound friendship for the bishop, meekly acquiesced. Saxo proceeds here from the classical Greco-Roman discourse in which candour is a distinctive feature of true friendship (*vera*

183 This refers to the historical part of *Gesta Danorum*. The legendary part, books I–IX, has not been analysed in detail.

184 Saxo, II.7.10.

amicitia), and therefore a friend should not fail to castigate a partner who has left the path of virtue (see Chapter 1). The theme recurs time and again in many works of medieval literature, from Alcuin and John of Salisbury to Dante and Machiavelli. This was thus a prominent feature of the medieval and Renaissance political ideology in which honesty was regarded as a counsellor's primary virtue.¹⁸⁵

Friendship is the bond that resolves the conflicts between the king and the bishop. On two occasions their friendship is subjected to tough tests, once when Svend, contrary to canon law, marries a Swedish queen to whom he is related by blood, and once when the king orders the murder in a church of a number of magnates whom he suspects of treason.¹⁸⁶ In both cases, however, Svend Estridsen repented his actions after being reproached by the bishop. William's "venerable counselling" and "determined teaching" had the effect that the king finally listened to his "instructor" and put away his Swedish wife.¹⁸⁷ The bishop made the king atone for his heinous crime against the murdered magnates by denying Svend admission to the church and then excommunicating him.¹⁸⁸ To gain William's forgiveness the king had to do penance and – like Henry IV – he was forced to "go to Canossa" barefoot to beg the bishop to deliver him from sin.¹⁸⁹

185 The opposite was the oily flatterer, as described for instance by John of Salisbury in *Policraticus*. The contrast also occurs in Saxo. Absalon's brother Esbern Snare is dissuaded on one occasion by Absalon from giving Valdemar I advice that could annoy the king. Esbern answered: "When integrity appears in danger, I'd certainly rather incur the displeasure of my sovereign through profitable counsel than attract his friendliness with empty servilities. In such circumstances it's better to be the object of anger after ministering reproof than win gratitude through cringing flattery". Saxo, 14.28.8. The episode indicates that a member of the king's inner circle always had to balance between sharing his lord's opinions and voicing his own thoughts, which could mean that he risked losing royal favour.

186 Saxo embraces here the classical view that the perfect friendship is a result of a long process in which the bond is tested by the friends being forced to display their steadfastness (*constantia*). See Chapter 1. The trustworthiness of the story about Svend Estridsen's incest and divorce based on Adam of Bremen has recently been called in question. See N. Lund, 2016, pp. 39–56.

187 Saxo, 11.7.4. Here Saxo follows a classical theme in medieval literature which concerns a master-disciple relationship in which the disciple meekly accepts advice from his spiritual leader. See e.g. R. Hyatte, 1994, p. 32.

188 William declares that Svend is unworthy to enter the house of God and prevents him from getting into the church by barring the door with his crozier. Saxo writes that "with no reference to his sovereign rank, he called him, not king, but a butcher who shed human gore", Saxo, 11.7.12.

189 Saxo, 11.7.15. Canute the Great is said to have made a similar barefoot pilgrimage to the grave of St Cuthbert in Durham in 1031. *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, pp. 68. This type of penitential ritual is common in medieval literature, Paul the Deacon, for example, tells

The author writes that it was his restraint (*temperantia*) and mildness (*mansuetudo*) that led the king's soul back on the proper path.¹⁹⁰ Despite serious conflicts, William had never renounced the profound friendship with Svend; he is said to have repaid this trust through righteous severity. After William's reprimands, the king and bishop were able to continue their harmonious collaboration based on a deep spiritual friendship.¹⁹¹ Here Saxo combines the Christian and the classical ideals of friendship. This is a friendship between two equals whose souls are united in the life after this. The author writes:

In mutual enthusiasm they vied with one another in paying deeply deferential courtesies and fostered the outstanding loyalty of their bond with an interchange of esteem so strong that one might discern between them rather an intimacy among equals than the friendliness of a superior to someone of lower station.¹⁹²

how Emperor Theodosius submits to Bishop Ambrose in the same way as Svend Estridsen bows to Bishop William (elsewhere Saxo refers explicitly to Paul, Saxo, 8.13.2). Another example is the work of Dudo of St Quentin, where penitential rituals are mentioned several times. These supplications often symbolize an ideal for political and social relations. Geoffrey Koziol has examined the phenomenon in detail. He adduces several examples of princes who take on the role of the repentant sinner, such as Louis the Pious and Robert the Pious. Through an act of *prostratio* the sinner lies down on the ground with his arms spread out like a cross. He is then barefoot and wearing simple clothes. Supplication, according to Koziol, was a very important ritual which was "an emblem of the unity of heavenly and earthly lordship and of the moral code that maintained justice", G. Koziol, 1992a, pp. 146, 8, 14, 84, 102, 181, 302. Repentance was thus a significant component in medieval rituals of submission. By showing remorse, people demonstrated their humility and acknowledged their guilt before God. H.J. Orning, 2008, p. 163, 192. See also the ritual of *editio* in G. Althoff, 1997, pp. 99–125 and R. Meens, 2014, pp. 180–189. The tests to which Svend's friendship with the bishop is subjected probably also symbolize a test of the king's devoutness and his *amicitia Dei*. Compare the friendship between the companions Ami and Amile, R. Hyatte, 1994, pp. 126 ff. Several medieval kings were given epithets such as "the pious" showing that they had acquired symbolic capital in the spiritual field. The Icelandic sagas, such as *Sturlunga saga*, often tell of how defeated enemies, before they are killed by the victor, lie down on the ground with their arms spread out like a cross to await the death blow. See e.g. *Sturlunga saga*, Chapter 85, p. 257, Chapter 200, p. 447. The ritual can also be found in saints' legends such as Ailnoth's chronicle of Knud the Holy.

190 On the medieval virtue of *mansuetudo*, see J. Gillingham, 1995, p. 148.

191 Svend's earlier career is described by Saxo as being beset by several setbacks, as he was a victim of the vicissitudes of fate (*fortuna*). See e.g. Saxo, 10.22.6. According to the Stoic doctrine, fate could only be influenced by the practice of true virtues. Q. Skinner, 1978, pp. 124 ff.

192 Saxo, 11.7.20.

The ultimate proof of the spiritual affinity between the two is expressed when Bishop William receives the news that Svend has died. He then orders a grave to be dug beside the king's in Trinity Church in Roskilde. William then sets off in haste to meet the king's funeral procession. When he arrives he asks his men to build a bier for him. Firmly resolved to follow his friend into death, he lies down on the bier, to everyone's surprise, and dies.¹⁹³ The king's bier is carried by his men while the bishop's is brought by horse. In this way William, according to the author, acts "almost as if he were driving him to his burial service".¹⁹⁴ The bishop thus had the role of the king's companion in both life and death. This, the final confirmation of William's dedication to the king, is described as a result of genuine emotions and not an expression of veneration for the king's position. The king and the bishop were buried close together and they are said to have had an "estimable friendship" in which the death of one meant that the other no longer wished to live.¹⁹⁵

The story of Svend Estridsen's relationship to Bishop William is thus described as a ritual drama in several acts. With this play Saxo seeks to demonstrate friendship as the strongest bond between people, outshining all other types of personal ties. Yet it is not pragmatic political friendship that is emphasized. Instead it is a purely spiritual friendship, based on genuine feelings. It is the affinity of two souls, with love (*caritas*) as the uniting bond, according to the concept of two hearts and one soul. The love is reflected in mutual trust (*fides*). In this friendship the bishop administers justice (*iustitia*) and Svend must submit to this if true noble friendship is to arise.¹⁹⁶

193 One of Saxo's chief literary models was Valerius Maximus. The Roman author represented a heroic ideal of friendship which rested on self-effacing loyalty, *devotio*, with genuine friends being prepared to die for each other. See Chapter 1. In the legendary part of *Gesta Danorum* Saxo tells of how Prince Asmund, son of the Norwegian king of Hedmarken, contracted an alliance of friendship, confirmed by oath, with Asvid, son of the king of Viken. They promised that the one who lived longest would let himself be buried together with the first of them to die. The author writes that: "So strong was their loving fellowship that neither proposed to prolong his days once the other had been snatched away by Fate". When Asvid died, Asmund was true to his oath and was buried alive together with his oath-brother. Saxo, 5.11.1; 5.11.3. On the definition of the concept of "loyalty", see S. Vanderputten, 2015, p. 280.

194 Saxo, 11.9.4.

195 Saxo's story is pure fiction. William died around 1073, that is, at least one year before Svend. He was succeeded by a man named Svend who was bishop of Roskilde at the time of Svend Estridsen's death. On the dating of Williams death, see comment in DD 1: 2, no. 9.

196 In this connection William represents the just Christian society, which does not tolerate the feud with its arbitrary use of force, as exemplified by the way Svend Estridsen has the magnates who are accused of treason killed without trial.

Central concepts are mutual respect, with both parties displaying goodwill (*benevolentia*) towards each other. This respect provides the foundation for loyalty. This is a relationship between two equals who have freely chosen each other and who exchange favours. The friendship is described not as a contracted agreement but as a lifelong process. Saxo thus proceeds from the classical ideal of friendship, *amicitia perfecta*, which built on loyalty, fidelity, advice, gratitude, and – if necessary – the duty to reproach a friend. Like Cicero, the author stresses the importance of *benevolentia*. According to Cicero, a relationship between two parties was not a friendship unless it was based on goodwill and mutual understanding. This devotion arose as the fruit of a lasting friendship between two persons who were attracted to each other because they were like each other. Mutual benevolence also played a prominent role for church fathers like Ambrose. For him, however, *benevolentia* was a fundamental requirement which *subsequently* created likeness, bridging differences and producing unity.¹⁹⁷ Saxo's view of the friendship between Svend and William essentially proceeds from Cicero's ideal, partly because goodwill crowns their ultimate friendship. The author, however, combines this ideal with Christian ideas according to which William's role as companion with the right to reprimand the king is justified by the fact that he represents the primary cardinal virtue of Christianity, devotion to God and the church.

The friendship between the king and the bishop symbolized a refined ideal unattainable to the vast majority. With this episode the author presumably wishes to demonstrate an *exemplum* for his contemporaries. The question then is, what is the purpose behind Saxo's elevation of the noble friendship between Svend Estridsen and Bishop William?

197 According to Eoin G. Cassidy, Ambrose sought to combine the classical view of friendship with the Christian concept of *caritas* – love. His theory was based primarily on Aristotle's ideal of friendship. According to Ambrose, friendship arose out of goodwill, "because for Ambrose, as distinct from Cicero, it is goodwill which creates that likeness that makes friendship possible", E.G. Cassidy, p. 59. Saxo took fragments of the story of Svend and William from Rufinus of Aquileia's account of how Ambrose defied Emperor Theodosius. E. Christiansen, 1980–81, p. 234, n. 30. The episode of how the king killed the mag-nates also incorporates elements of the legend of St Nicholas. In 1103 the Danish king Erik Ejegod went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He met the Byzantine emperor who, according to Saxo, gave him holy bones from St Nicholas. Erik Ejegod is then said to have had these relics sent to Denmark to give them to the church in Slangerup where he was born. Saxo, 12.7.4. Markús Skeggjason's poem *Eiríksdrápa* describes the Danish king's earlier journey to Bari in 1098–1099. At that time the town had become the centre of the cult of St Nicholas, as the saint's relics had been preserved there since 1087. It appears likely that it was during Erik's reign that the legend of St Nicholas took root in Denmark's intellectual circles. Perhaps Saxo was influenced by this in his portrayal of Bishop William.

5.4 *The Friendship between Bishop Absalon and Valdemar I*

In *Gesta Danorum* the author often uses parallelisms. In this context the ideal friendship between Svend Estridsen and his bishop serves as a prototype for the relationship between Bishop Absalon and Valdemar I (r. 1157–1182).¹⁹⁸ Earlier research has mainly interpreted the author's *exemplum* as symbolizing the sacred union between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*. This explanation seems justified but it is a gross simplification. Saxo's parallelism was much more complex than this. It is an episode with many levels which must be read on a deeper plane where we primarily ask ourselves *why* the author gives the friendship such a prominent place in the relationship between the king and his bishop.

Previous research has chiefly taken Absalon as a representative of the church as an institution and thus belonging to the ecclesiastical elite. I would instead emphasize Absalon's role as a representative of a collective in that he was a central figure in an important system of alliances.¹⁹⁹ In the competition in the political arena of the elite, Absalon was the leading spokesperson of the Skjalm clan, whereas Valdemar represented the royal branch descending from Knud Lavard (duke: 1115–1131). The bonds between the two families were very close. Knud Lavard had been brought up by Absalon's grandfather, Skjalm Hvide. According to Saxo, this tradition was passed on when Valdemar was brought up by Absalon's father, Asser Rig. The two foster-brothers then attained increasingly prominent positions in the realm. When Valdemar became sole king of the country he appointed Absalon as bishop of Roskilde and he then advanced, some twenty years later, to become archbishop of Denmark. During Valdemar's reign the members of the Skjalm clan reached higher and higher positions as bishops, generals, and territorial rulers. Saxo is very careful to stress the close affiliation of these magnates to the Valdemarian kings.

In the story of King Svend and Bishop William, Saxo can be interpreted as a spokesman of the new clerical elite where William the office holder symbolizes the important function of the clerics in the government of the kingdom. Bishop Absalon, however, is not just a representative of the clerical estate but also of the warrior caste. In Absalon's person the author unites the classical chivalrous virtues with the Christian ideal of piety. The bishop brilliantly discharged the duties of the sacred office while simultaneously representing

198 E. Christiansen, 1980–1981, p. 235, n. 30.

199 In Saxo's retelling he appears primarily to belong to an educated higher aristocracy rather than a member of the ecclesiastical elite as a group. This is in contrast to, say, John of Salisbury, who chiefly identifies with the clerical elite. Saxo is unfavourably disposed to the monastic church. Other sources, however, testify that Absalon did not represent the same stance when he actively backed the monastic movement. On Absalon's support to the monasteries see B.P. McGuire, 2000, pp. 75–86.

an ideal military leader, characterized by courage, vigour, and masculine strength. Absalon thus embodies the ideal of the perfect crusader in whom the clerical and the secular aristocracy blend.

Bishop Absalon and the positions of the Skjalm collective at the king's side could not be taken for granted, however. The author hints that their position was threatened from several quarters. Magnate families from Jutland and Skåne were opposed to the dominance of the Sjælland network. Several members of the royal family took a dim view of how Absalon and his relatives had become the king's *familiares*. Saxo also paints a distorted picture of the circle around the king. The lists of witnesses in the diplomas shows that Valdemar surrounded himself with a great many magnates who did not belong to the Skjalm clan. When Valdemar died he was succeeded by his son Knud VI. During his reign there was a growth in the foreign element at court, partly as a consequence of the king's marriage to Gertrud, daughter of Henry the Lion.²⁰⁰ The German influence was intensified under Knud's successor Valdemar II. He practised, to a greater extent, a hierarchical form of government, not based so much on bilateral exchange with the indigenous high aristocracy. When Saxo composed his work, the informal consensus between the king and the Skjalm group was threatened. It was therefore important to legitimize the place of these magnates close to the king.

It is in this context we must consider Absalon's role as Bishop William's spiritual heir. Saxo underlines time and again how the profound friendship between Valdemar and Absalon was the foundation for their fruitful political collaboration. Yet the relationship was not without conflict. The foster-brothers' friendship was often put to the test. Saxo rarely portrays Valdemar as an exemplary model. He is frequently described as passive, irresolute, and inclined to make the wrong decision.²⁰¹ Instead it is the members of the Skjalm clan

200 K. Johannesson, 1978 pp. 330 f. The marriage was agreed upon, according to Saxo, when Henry the Lion's daughter and Knud were infants, in order to confirm a joint military pact against the eastern Slavs. Saxo, 14.30.1. Helmold, however, writes that Gertrud as a child was promised to Duke Frederick of Swabia. The young daughter who was promised was Richizia, who died as a child and then Gertrud had to take her place as Knud's betrothed. E. Christiansen, 1980–1981, p. 831, n. 458; p. 815, n. 385. Gertrud was buried in 1197 in the monastery church in Vå (belong to the Premonstratensian order) located in eastern Skåne. It may seem strange that she was not buried in the Valdemarian mausoleum in Ringsted. Perhaps it was a symbolic marking of the expanded power of the Danish realm in the east where the queen symbolized the Danish-Saxon friendship pact which defeated the eastern Slavs. Another explanation may be that holy relics were preserved in Vå and prominent persons therefore wanted to be buried close to the saint. It is also possible that Gertrud had a special relationship to the Premonstratensians.

201 B. Sawyer, 1985, pp. 685–705.

who maintain the classical virtues. In the repeated Danish campaigns against the Slavs, Absalon – like Bishop William – often acts as the king's stern advisor, who does not hesitate to reproach his friend when he makes the wrong decision.²⁰² When the king heeds Absalon's advice, things go well. When he chooses to listen to other advisors, things go badly. Saxo often lets Valdemar (like Svend Estridsen) display his gratitude (*pietas*) and deep devotion to the bishop's wise advice. This often finds symbolic expression in a kiss or an embrace from the grateful king to his friend. This is especially noticeable when they meet or part.²⁰³

The author is careful to emphasize the mutual respect and trust the two friends had for each other. Love and emotions play an important part in their relationship. This is noticeable when Saxo describes the disclosure of a plot (1176) in which Valdemar's relatives planned to murder him. Saxo writes that the messenger who had the task of informing the king about the individuals involved in the plot felt nervous about it. He did not want to warn Valdemar in Absalon's presence because the archbishop was related to the conspirators. The king then said: "Absalon's loyalty releases you from this fear, since I'd have no doubt that his regard for my esteem outweighs any natural feelings he may have for his relations".²⁰⁴ This bond, based on love and friendship, is thus reckoned by Saxo as much stronger than ties of biological kinship.

Valdemar I's obituary could be interpreted as a glorification of the king's lifework in that he is depicted as the defender of the Danish realm. Here, however, it is not Valdemar's individual achievements that are held up as most important for posterity to remember. Instead it is the noble friendship between the king and Absalon that the author praises most. The account of Valdemar's death shows parallels to the description of the spiritual union of Svend Estridsen and Bishop William. On his deathbed in 1182, Valdemar is a contrite penitent confessing his sins to Absalon. Their friendship thus represents a Christian ideal in that it functions as a path to reach God and salvation. When Valdemar has passed away, the only people mentioned as being present in the royal chamber are "the king's friends", that is to say, member of the Skjalm clan. Saxo is eager to demonstrate how close these magnates are to Valdemar's *familia* and the innermost private sphere. No royal relatives are mentioned as mourning at the king's bed. Absalon's cousin, Sune Ebbesen – Archbishop

202 Saxo, 14.20.2, 14.23.7, 14.38.5.

203 Gerd Althoff has observed that this was a common theme in medieval biographies of bishops which describe relations between a bishop and his temporal lord. G. Althoff, 1999, p. 95.

204 Saxo, 14.54.8.

Andreas Sunesen's father – represents the virtue of *prudentia* by predicting the king's death and advising "the others" – presumably the Skjalm group – to take measures to ensure that the king's son, Knud VI, can keep the crown now that his father is dead. The son himself seems incapable of making a decision on this important issue.

When Absalon read the mass for the dead at the king's funeral, he displayed the same profound spiritual affinity to Valdemar as Bishop William had done with Svend Estridsen. Absalon was overwhelmed by such strong emotions of grief and pain that he wished to give up the ghost, like William, and accompany his friend in death. By bursting into tears, the bishop reveals his powerful devotion (*benevolentia*) to the king.²⁰⁵ But despite his despair, Absalon summons up the courage to fulfil his calling. Saxo writes that when one of the lights of the kingdom had gone out, the other one could not be allowed to be extinguished because Denmark would then be without a leader and a patron. Here the archbishop observes the supreme duty, loyalty to the *patria*, that according to Cicero was above all other bonds of loyalty. It is striking that the author does not say a word about the king's son and heir to the kingdom.

Bishop William's and Svend Estridsen's friendship symbolizes the unity of *regnum* and *sacerdotium*. This is also the case with the friendship between Absalon and Valdemar, but this relationship represents something more. It unites not only king and church but also the king and the aristocracy. Absalon's role as leader and protector of the kingdom, and Sune Ebbesen's far-sighted wisdom show the justified position of the Skjalm clan in the government of the realm. With this Saxo seeks to take the spiritual community one step further than in the case of William and Svend. William cannot be interpreted as a representative of the Danish aristocracy because he was a foreigner – according to Saxo an Englishman, but it is more likely that he was of German origin – who had to ties to the Danish magnate families. Despite this, William, by virtue of his office, is a legitimizing model for the interaction between king and aristocracy.

When *Gesta Danorum* was being completed, the Skjalm clan had acquired a virtual monopoly on the bishoprics in Denmark. In the High Middle Ages the king of Denmark had great influence over the appointment of bishops, which meant that the magnates were dependent on the king's favour if they were to become bishops. William chiefly represents a strong personality, vigorously defending the church and the office of bishop. Archbishop Absalon not only

205 Saxo concludes this episode with the words: "And I could imagine that the incense, made wet by his weeping, emitted a fragrance that was gratifying to the Lord". Saxo, 15,6.12. The blending of Absalon's tears with the incense probably symbolizes his spiritual union with Valdemar. In this way the tears help the king's soul to obtain forgiveness for his sins.

stands up for the church and its officers but also represents a whole network distinguished by specific collective qualities. This group thus incarnates the true aristocracy, worthy of their positions. No distinction is made between a clerical and a secular elite. Spiritual friendship between king and bishop is thus elevated to a larger, more complex political context. It serves as a legitimizing basis for the pragmatic friendship that is seen in books fourteen and fifteen.

What is emphasized is not these magnates' noble birth but primarily their role as embodiments of eternal classical ideals. One example is when Bishop Absalon accuses Valdemar of cowardice because he wants to withdraw with his fleet during an expedition against the Wends. The bishop regarded this act as dishonourable, craven, and "womanish". Instead the king ought to demonstrate his bravery by defending his *patria*, and thereby display his energy. Here Absalon represents classical virtues such as *strenuitas*, *andreia*, and *pietas*. The bishop's uprightness is contrasted with the king's lack of virtue.

The author thus lets the bishop, not the king, symbolize the timeless ideal lord.²⁰⁶ As if this were not enough, it is the bishop who displays wrath when he scolds the king. In medieval sources wrath (*ira*) was primarily a royal prerogative – *ira regis*.²⁰⁷ Valdemar incurs the bishop's wrath on several occasions. This was also the case with Svend Estridsen, who had to endure Bishop William's ire. In the historical part of *Gesta Danorum* it is thus the bishops rather than the kings who are allowed to vent wrath, in other words, *ira episcopi* instead of *ira regis*. The righteous biblical wrath (as displayed by God, especially in the Old Testament) is thus not associated with a Christian kingly ideology. It is instead chiefly the bishops who have the ability to exploit emotions for rational purposes. The kings in Saxo's work thus do not have a monopoly on the strongest feelings. Perhaps this is a way to mark that the aristocracy was not dependent on the prince's favour and his deliberately capricious emotional state. At the same time, the episodes show the prominent role of strong feelings in the medieval political arena.

As in William of Æbelholt's collection of letters, the interplay between spirituality and pragmatism is also a characteristic feature in the *Gesta Danorum*. Bishop Absalon incarnated an amalgamation of classical chivalrous virtues and Christian ideals of piety. He was not only portrayed as a person who brilliantly fulfilled duties connected to his holy office. Simultaneously, the bishop was depicted as a brave war-leader and crusader (*miles Christi*) who always

206 Saxo, 14.23.7.

207 On medieval royal wrath, *Ira Regis*, see e.g. G. Althoff, 1998, pp. 59–74; S.D. White, 1998, pp. 127–152. On unpredictability in the actions of Norwegian kings and their deliberate use of wrath as a technique of rulership, see H.J. Orning, 2008.

succeeded with his royal missions in the Baltic. Saxo repeatedly shows how the king's intimate friendship with Absalon also bore fruit in a utilitarian relationship. In contrast to Valdemar's disloyal and cowardly kinsmen, Bishop Absalon and the other members of the Skjalm clan were always ready to undertake dangerous military expeditions. Saxo was eager to show that all successful military operations in the Baltic Sea were a result of fruitful cooperation between friends.

Occasionally Valdemar was portrayed as a child unable to control his emotions. Saxo blamed the king for failed military expeditions and explained the failures as a consequence of Valdemar acting too impulsively, by following his personal emotions and rejecting the bishop's advice. In contrast, Absalon's emotions were always in conformity with what was good for the Danish *patria*. Thereby he not only displayed the virtue of *temperantia* (self-discipline), but also *prudentia* (foresight/wisdom) enabling him to foresee the future, which meant that Absalon embodied the true responsible visionary in the *Gesta Danorum*. According to the Greco-Roman paragon of virtue, when misused *andreia* (manliness, courage, manly spirit) manifested itself as anger, aggression, and military vainglory; properly used, it appeared as self-directed, constructive anger.²⁰⁸ Hence Absalon used his emotions in a rational manner and through him Saxo utilized the disciplining and controlling function of emotions.²⁰⁹ The bishop's emotions were always in symbiosis with the well-being of the *patria*. Emotions thus played an important role in the *Gesta Danorum* as intermediating links that kept communities together.²¹⁰

That Saxo gives friendship such a prominent place in the relationship between the bishop and the king could be explained by the position of Absalon and his successor Andreas Sunesen at the king's side. Valdemar I's successors Knud VI and Valdemar II had to be reminded of the gratitude and respect they owed their archbishops and that they ought not to seek support from elsewhere. The profound spiritual friendship symbolized this symbiosis. Bishop William's conflicts with Svend Estridsen serve as an illustration of how all

208 Uebersax, "Andreia", <http://www.john-uebersax.com/plato/words/andreia.htm>.

209 Absalon's energetic character is expressed, for example, in an episode where King Valdemar asked his men if anyone was willing to act as an envoy to Henry the Lion. However, his men were scared to "undertake so perilous an embassy, when Absalon came out of a thicket where he had been passing the time as usual by cutting wood". Saxo, 14.25.11. The king then turned to Absalon with his inquiry and the bishop did not hesitate to undertake the mission. "Idleness is the parent of all vices", but the virtuous Absalon always knew how to do something useful and rational. Accordingly, he spends his spare time cutting wood.

210 L. Hermanson, 2016, p. 79.

conflicts are subordinate to the high ideals of friendship. The few individuals who had been granted friendship with the king were also persons who would be the king's companions in the future. Saxo's emphasis on one specific group's intimate ties to the king can thus be interpreted as an esoteric demonstration.

6 Collective Pragmatic Friendship: Alliance Systems and Politics

Saxo, however, faced a serious problem when he had to legitimize how Valdemar I and the Skjalm clan come to power. They had actually appropriated their leading positions by being disloyal to their lord and king, Svend Grathe. We shall therefore look more closely at the picture Saxo paints of the reign of Svend Grathe (r. 1146–1154) and his relation to his subjects. In this episode friendship plays a prominent role in the author's ambition to justify action that could otherwise easily be regarded as treason.

After the death of the Danish king Erik Lam in 1146 there was bitter rivalry between two pretenders to the throne, Svend Grathe and Knud Magnussen. They represented two opposing branches of the royal line. Svend soon succeeded in gaining the throne, but Knud tried repeatedly to seize the crown by force. Svend Grathe nevertheless defeated his opponent in one battle after another. Although Svend had greater military strength, Knud finally managed to gain the crown without having defeated his opponent in a single battle. The question is, how could this happen?

Saxo explains Svend's success in 1146–1151 by pointing out that the king had a well-developed network of kinsmen and friends among the country's noble families. One of Svend Grathe's most important allies was his cousin, Duke Valdemar. He belonged to the king's *familia* and probably regarded Knud Magnussen as an ancestral enemy since it was Knud's father, Magnus Nielsen, who had killed Valdemar's father, Knud Lavard. Svend's network of allies also included the Skjalm clan in Sjælland, represented by men like Absalon, his brother Esbern Snare, and their cousin Sune Ebbesen. A powerful contributory factor in Knud Magnussen's success in putting Svend to flight was that Valdemar and several members of the Skjalm group in 1152 chose to end their loyalty to Svend. Instead they joined his opponent, Knud Magnussen. This was in breach of an oath and a blatant offence against the medieval ideal of fidelity.²¹¹ Saxo was therefore forced to legitimize the change of allegiance so that Valdemar and his allies would not be regarded as traitors and thus serve as a symbol of false friends.

²¹¹ L. Hermanson, 2013, p. 115.

The author solves this dilemma by depicting Svend as a lord who had failed in his duties of friendship to his allies. Since he had not ruled in consensus with the high aristocracy of the country, he could not expect any loyalty from them. In this context it is *not* – as in the case of Svend Estridsen and Bishop William – spiritual friendship between two persons that is in focus. Instead it is collective pragmatic friendship, associated with alliance systems and the exercise of power that is the main theme. Svend Grathe serves here as an *exemplum* of a *rex tyrannus* who acts contrary to the ideals of mutual respect between allies. The king's reign thus serves as a deterrent example of a ruler who has left the path of virtue.²¹² By using a contrasting technique, Saxo makes Valdemar and the Skjalm group appear as representatives of true alliances. Here the bond of friendship is a foundation for righteous rule, in contrast to Svend Grathe's tyrannical reign, which breaks the unwritten rules governing interaction between the king and the aristocracy. What picture does the author convey of the king's "unrighteous" rule?

Svend Grathe was at the peak of his power around 1151. According to Saxo he had many friends among Denmark's leading magnate families. Bonds of friendship, for example, demanded huge resources because they had to be maintained and given new nourishment through gifts and rewards. A successful military commander acquired many friends because he could recompense his men with war booty and territory. Saxo writes that this was one of the reasons why Svend decided to attack Sweden in 1151. The campaign is described as a sign that the king had been afflicted by the classical deadly sin of pride (*superbia*), reflected in the way Svend, before the expedition, awarded honours and territories in Sweden to his allies, as if victory were already his. The invasion, however, ended in disaster, which meant a severe loss of prestige for the Danish king.²¹³ His powerful aristocratic friends then began, one by one, to abandon their lord and instead support his enemy Knud Magnusen.²¹⁴ According to Saxo, Svend had only himself to blame.

212 A parallel to Svend Grathe can be found in Saxo's legendary part, in the form of the Danish king Jarmerik, who lets himself be duped by the foreign counsellor Bikke, who "incited Jarmerik to the most execrable deeds". The result of the advice was that "the king renounced virtue for squalid vices". Saxo, 8.10.8.

213 Saxo, 14.12.6.

214 A parallel can be drawn here to the situation in Iceland. The author of *Sturlunga saga* tells of how the chieftain Snorri Sturluson loses a large share of his friends when he shows signs of weakness because of his military failures. Snorri then gets a bad reputation, or *óhóf* as this is called in Icelandic sources. This taint was associated with a lack of probity and reliability that was designated as *ójafnaðr*. An unfair man was called *ójafnaðarmaðr* because his greed risked disturbing the power balance. J.L. Byock, 1988, p. 128. Svend Grathe's situation is very similar to the description by Snorri Sturluson of how King Eysteinn

He claims that the king did not live up to the virtue of moderation: *temperantia*. Honour was acquired through the ability to resist temptation, but Svend yielded to the temptations of power. Saxo asserts that Svend Grathe abandoned the technique of lordship that was sanctified by tradition, based on friendships with the high aristocracy of the country, in favour of a style of lordship building on vertical liaisons with people of low birth. He thus broke the unwritten rules about alliances between kings and magnates. Saxo tells with disgust how the king “furnished his palace with a cortège of sleekly groomed minions”.²¹⁵ This court wallowed in intemperate luxury and foreign customs.

Svend was probably influenced by the modern style of kingship practised by the German Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. The Danish king regarded Frederick as one of his close friends, having spent his youth at the court of Emperor Conrad.²¹⁶ He is said to have been a “friend and fellow soldier” (*amicus et comiles*) of Frederick Barbarossa. Perhaps Svend valued his mighty foreign friends more highly than his domestic allies. During the twelfth century the Danish kings and their rivals had become increasingly involved in the political machinations of the Empire.²¹⁷ The whole of *Gesta Danorum* bears the stamp of an anti-German tendency, which is particularly striking in the author’s description of Svend Grathe’s rule. The author here is probably aiming his criticism at the contemporary German influence at the court of Knud VI. All this negative portrayal then serves as a background to the change of sides by Valdemar and his supporters.

In 1152 Svend’s former allies, Duke Valdemar and several members of the Skjalm clan, joined Knud Magnusen’s forces. Valdemar made a pact of friendship (*amicitia*) with Knud, which was confirmed by his betrothal to Knud’s half-sister Sofia. He was also promised one third of Knud’s *patrimonium*.²¹⁸ In 1154 Knud and Valdemar proclaimed themselves as kings. Svend was then forced to declare war on the rebellious kings. Yet he was unable to raise an army for his cause in a short time. Svend was first forced to assemble his soldiers to assure himself of their support. Placing their hands on a reliquary, each of them had to swear an oath of fidelity to the king.

On this occasion one of the king’s most important allies, Bishop Absalon’s cousin Sune Ebbesen, chose to switch to the opposing side. He refused to

of Norway lost his allies in 1157, when they switched allegiance to his opponent, King Inge. See Chapter 4.

215 Saxo, 14.9.1.

216 Svend Grathe’s government through people of low birth is similar to the way German princes made use of unfree officials, known as *ministeriales*.

217 M.H. Gelting, 2004, pp. 181–229.

218 Saxo, 14.14.2.

renew his oath of loyalty to Svend, explaining that the king had deprived him of his hereditary property. Saxo writes that, besides pride, Svend Grathe had been guilty of the classical vice of avarice by seizing farms and estates belonging to dead royal supporters, with the result that their children were robbed of their inheritance. The king promised to give redress, but Sune was courageous and proud, choosing to join Valdemar instead. To legitimize this change of loyalties, the author refers to the old bonds of friendship between Valdemar and Sune's family.²¹⁹ The author is careful to point out that Sune renounced his loyalty to his lord in a public context to show that he was acting honourably, not in an underhand way.

This triggered a domino effect as the majority of Svend's men went over to the other side. The king also failed in his loyalty to his retainers when, according to Saxo, he chose "with great shame" to flee abroad when his once so powerful networks collapsed. This showed that he was not an exemplary lord for his followers because he broke his *fides* towards them. Saxo consequently lets Svend Grathe embody unrighteous lordship. The king had lost his right to the throne when he had succumbed to classical vices such as pride, intemperance, poor judgement, and avarice.²²⁰ Friendship here represents an ideal of justice.²²¹ The Danish magnates no longer owed their loyalty to the king since he had not fulfilled the duties of reciprocal friendship. He had merely displayed ingratitude to them through his greed (*avaritia*) and lack of generosity (*liberalitas*).²²² Valdemar and the members of the Skjalm group could thus abandon their lord without any loss of honour. The hated King Svend is contrasted with Valdemar's good reputation and energy and Sune Ebbesen's adherence to the strength of old friendships.

Here the bond of friendship is a foundation for just collective rule, where the king is expected to govern in consensus with his friends among the high aristocracy of the country. The episode thus concerns the political friendship between the king and a large group. The author emphasizes the ancient ideal

219 Saxo, 14.16.5.

220 Saxo here follows the same moral principles as John of Salisbury. According to John, pride was the root of all evil and the cause of mortality. If one is intemperate one is not on the right path but walking alongside the path. John of Salisbury, *Polycraticus*, Chapter 3, p. 17.

221 This ideal can be traced back to Aristotle. C.S. Jaeger has analysed this form of friendship based on "ethical excellence" (*arete*). He quotes some lines from Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*: "Since friendship is a thing like justice, the level of friendship in a state is an indication of the level of justice; if there is no friendship, the 'constitution' is corrupt and the state a tyranny; friendship is a higher form of justice, since if men are friends, they have no need of justice". C.S. Jaeger, 1999, pp. 29 f.

222 On the deadly sin of *avaritia*, see R. Newhauser, 2000. For the outlook on avarice and generosity in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, see L. Kjær, 2012, pp. 183–214.

of equality, with the king's rule resting on an implicit agreement by which the equals had chosen each other. The consensus had to be repeatedly confirmed through gifts and rewards. As a result of the king's pride, stinginess, and greed, he loses the friendship of a large group. When people change sides it is not treacherous behaviour but rather a noble act. Saxo is thus able to promote the status and freedom of the high aristocracy. They are not subjects but friends who choose to submit to a lord, but only on certain premises. Their positions do not rely on their enjoying the king's favour.

The ultimate proof of Svend Grathe's disloyal nature is seen in 1157 when he negotiates peace with Valdemar and Knud Magnusen. Under the guise of friendship he invites his former enemies to a banquet in Roskilde. Here, however, he attacks them and has Knud Magnusen killed, while Valdemar grievously wounded managed to escape. Svend had thereby violated the sanctity of the banquet, a very serious crime because a feast (*convivium*) in the Middle Ages was regarded as one of the major friendship rituals.²²³ Valdemar's final victory over Svend at the Battle of Grathe hede a few months later meant that the old form of kingly rule based on horizontal ties to the high aristocrats of the country had triumphed. The power balance between the king and the magnates was thus restored. With this narrative Saxo wished to inform his readers that a Danish king was unable to rule without the support of his powerful friends among the aristocracy.

7 The Practical Benefit of Friendship

A distinctive feature in Saxo's account of the reigns of Valdemar I and his son Knud VI is the way he underlines the kings' need for support and guidance from counsellors with political experience. It is not just a matter of using Cicero's *De Amicitia* as a model to stress how important it is for the king to listen to his advisors. The crucial thing for Saxo was that the king took counsel from the *right* advisors. These advisors could almost exclusively be found among the king's friends in the Skjalm clan. During Valdemar's reign the author gives this group an increasingly prominent role. The king then loses his status as an independent actor in favour of the political and military contributions of the Skjalm group. Saxo repeats time and again Valdemar's dependence on and debt of gratitude to these magnates. He now concentrates on specifying their functions in the government of the kingdom. His aim is to demonstrate the practical benefits of friendship. We shall therefore investigate the picture

²²³ On feasts and friendship rituals, see W. Jezierski *et al.*, 2015, pp. 139–357.

the author paints of the functions of friendship in connection with concrete political actions.

In rendering the events during Valdemar I's reign, Saxo repeatedly stresses the value of the king's friendship with Bishop Absalon. In the author's preface and in Valdemar's obituary it is primarily the king's friendship with the bishop that is held up, more so than Valdemar's personal actions. But it is not just the king's friendship with Absalon that Saxo praises after 1157. The lists of witnesses in the diplomas issued during the first years of Valdemar's reign show that the inner circle around the king mainly consisted of his kinsmen. Valdemar's power position was still highly uncertain, and therefore he seems to have relied chiefly on royal kinsmen. This way of exercising power is condemned by Saxo. He portrays the royal kinsmen as incompetent and arrogant advisors. This is expressed when Valdemar, after a campaign against the Wends, entrusted his nephew Knud Prizlavsén with guard duty on the island of Rügen. Knud refused, however, claiming that the king had rewarded him with far too small a fief in Denmark. His bitter response was that Valdemar ought to consult the bishops "who were the only individuals the king employed as his advisors".²²⁴ It is fairly obvious that Knud is referring to Bishop Absalon and his friends. The king's response was that Knud had been given a small fief because he had not earned anything bigger. This type of ingratitude among the king's relatives then becomes a recurrent theme. They are described as deceitful, grasping, and disloyal to the king.

When Valdemar told his good friend Absalon about his nephew's refusal, the bishop offered to perform the task. Saxo then gives an account of how the bishop energetically set about organizing the expedition to Rügen. Absalon contacted his "friends from Sjælland" (*amicis e Syalandia*) to find out which of them would be prepared to assist the king and the bishop. A potentate named Torben was the first to volunteer for this dangerous mission. He did so on account of his friendship with the bishop. This was a result of Absalon's having previously mediated with the king to release Torben from the banishment to which he had been condemned after the Battle of Grathe hede. The next to join was the magnate and castellan Peder Thorstensen, stating as his reason that he was intimately connected to Absalon "by kinship and by marriage" (he was married to Absalon's aunt). Both Torben and Peder had previously been among the nearest men of Valdemar's enemy Svend Grathe but now he offered his services to the king because of his friendship with Absalon.

224 Saxo, 14.43.5. The episode could be interpreted as an expression of serious tensions between a clerical elite and a traditional aristocracy, but in this case it is more a matter of a conflict between royal kinsmen and the high aristocracy.

Saxo goes on to say that powerful members of the Skjalm clan, such as Absalon's brother Esbern Snare and his cousin Sune Ebbesen, joined the bishop. The author ends the episode by noting that in this way almost the whole Sjælland fleet was mobilized. Absalon thus represented a group that never left the king in the lurch. Valdemar is later said to have thanked this band of men linked to Absalon for displaying the chivalrous quality of *virtus*. Valdemar thus had these men to thank for their willingness to collaborate. It was not that the king had ordered them to undertake a mission. It is not a royal army being mustered; instead the fleet is mobilized on a horizontal basis, as a result of different Sjælland magnates banding together with their private forces. Consequently it is only at second hand that they are acting on behalf of the king. It is Absalon they join on account of their close bonds of kinship or friendship.²²⁵ It is not duty or loyalty to the king as a person that is decisive for the magnates' military support. Saxo does not paint a picture of Valdemar as a feudal lord surrounded by vassals acting on the king's orders.²²⁶ He wants instead to make the entire operation seem like a mutual exchange between friends. This pattern of action is preferable to the author, rather than that the king should be forced to seek support from some ungrateful and haughty royal kinsman. According to Saxo, the royal descendants threatened the stability of the kingdom because they gave higher priority to self-interest than to what was best for the country.

Valdemar's kinsmen were in fact his worst enemies. They are recurrently portrayed as a bunch of treacherous conspirators trying to deprive Valdemar of the crown.²²⁷ The above episode is just one of several examples of how Saxo highlights the significance of friendship rather than kinship. He firmly rejects royal nepotism. This attitude can be explained by the political conditions prevailing under Valdemar I's successors, Knud VI and Valdemar II, that is to say, from 1182 to 1241. Knud VI and Valdemar II aimed to distance the royal family from the Danish aristocracy in order to create a specific exclusiveness around the member of the royal family. The *arengae* (preambles) of the diplomas express a strictly hierarchical Christian ideology of lordship, according to which the kings, following a western European model, claimed that they derived their power from God.²²⁸ This strategy was a threat to the Danish aristocracy who thereby risked losing their political influence.

225 Patron-client relations are mentioned just once in *Gesta Danorum*. On Absalon's role as a *patronus*, see L. Hermanson, 2003, pp. 53 ff.

226 In *Gesta Danorum* there are in fact few traces of the formalized feudal system of government that many historians have regarded as characteristic of twelfth-century society.

227 L. Hermanson, 2013, pp. 107–140.

228 The *arenga* in a diploma stipulates the purpose and legitimacy of the document. O. Guyotjeannin, J. Pycke & B.-M. Tock, 2006 (1st ed. 1993), p. 76. Diplomas, memorial

Saxo's ideology of consensus is a stark contrast to this ideal of lordship. Perhaps the author wanted to enlist the aid of classical and Christian doctrines of friendship to create an aristocratic political alternative to kingship by the grace of God. Here he was able to utilize an archaic ideology with a tradition that can be traced back to the Carolingian era.²²⁹ Birgit Sawyer thinks that Saxo – like his Icelandic colleague Snorri Sturluson – took a stance in a European intellectual debate between advocates of absolute hereditary kingship by the grace of God and those who defended the constitutional elective monarchy based on consensus between the king and the people/the aristocracy.²³⁰ *Gesta Danorum* could then be seen as a statement in a western European political debate about different perceptions of the form of kingship, where Saxo sides with critics of the doctrine of *Dei gratia* (see also Chapter 4).

Against the background of Sawyer's interpretation, it is possible here to explain why Saxo ascribes such a prominent role to the bond of friendship. Righteous rule is exercised in *Gesta Danorum* by the king cooperating with his friends in the aristocracy. This form of government is legitimized by the classical association of friendship with justice, charisma, and tradition. The author thus demonstrates a venerable collective form of government resting on a foundation of classical virtues and eternal truths. This ideal is given a Christian sanction via the divine essence of spiritual friendship, which means that Saxo's ideology of power – no less than the *Dei gratia* doctrine – has a Christian basis. The author nevertheless succeeds in grounding his collective lordship in an ancient tradition and thereby establishing continuity back in time. This political model, in which the king is just a *primus inter pares*, is thus a counter to the hierarchical hereditary kingship proclaimed in the diplomas of Knud VI and Valdemar II. That Saxo is not a keen supporter of hereditary kingship is evident, for instance, in the way Knud VI plays no part whatever in the death of Valdemar I. The author's *exempla* concerning the deadly sin of pride (*superbia*) can also be given a probable interpretation as a critique of the kings' claims to sovereignty.²³¹

inscriptions, seals, and coins show that the crusades had a central function in strengthening the exclusiveness of kingship. In evidence of this type the Danish kings are portrayed as the leading defenders of Christianity. Saxo, however, is keen to show the active role of the aristocracy in the crusades against the Wends and the Baltic peoples. It is almost exclusively the heroic deeds of the magnates in the struggle against the pagans that are described in *Gesta Danorum*. The Rügen episode is one of several examples where the author demonstrates the competence of the aristocracy in this field.

229 On the Carolingian consensus ideology, *consensus fidelium* see J. Canning, 1996, pp. 45 f., 60 ff.; R. Le Jan, 2000, pp. 53–68. See also Chapter 4.

230 B. Sawyer, 1994, p. 538; B. Sawyer, 2015.

231 See page 98 and L. Hermanson, 2000, p. 215.

7.1 *Friends and Royal Kinsmen*

The flexible bilateral kinship system enabled kings to hand-pick their own *familia*, which could consist of both relatives and friends. There could be tensions in this circle, however. In the choice of whether to rely on friends or kinsmen, Saxo appears to prefer friends. This category of allies ensures reliability and loyalty, in contrast to kinsmen who often represent treachery and disloyalty. With the Rügen episode Saxo sought to show how Valdemar's friendship with Bishop Absalon bore fruit in *utilitas*, that is, by proving useful. According to Cicero's ideal, the highest stage in human friendship was attained when *honestas* and *utilitas* were combined.²³²

Under Valdemar's reign there was a gradual change in the composition of the king's inner circle. From having mainly surrounded himself with royal kinsmen when he acceded to the throne, the king went on to rely on support from friends belonging to different groupings of magnates. Valdemar appears to have wished to concentrate power in his own branch of the dynasty, and therefore ruthlessly purged kinsmen belonging to other branches of the royal line. Saxo tries to justify this policy by portraying the royal kinsmen as rebels and conspirators. Their deceitful nature thus legitimizes the newly won place of the Skjalm clan in the inner circle around the king. The author's chief instruments of legitimation are the law, in that the conspirators are condemned for high treason according to established legal rules, and the ideal of friendship, which in this context represents justice, *iustitia*. Merely being a kinsman of the king, according to the author, was not enough. To gain the ruler's favour, a kinsman must also have been granted the privilege of calling himself the king's friend.

The king could obtain several practical advantages by letting his inner circle consist of friends among the aristocracy instead of royal kinsmen. It took a lot of resources to have royal kinsmen as allies because they demanded huge economic compensation in exchange for their friendship. Behind these demands they could also assert their hereditary right to the royal patrimony. The magnates often had the king to thank for their position and thus could not ask such a high price for their loyalty. We should also bear in mind that the magnates already owned substantial amounts of land. In the competition for the king's favour, the bonds of friendship were the aristocracy's most important instrument because the royal dynasty at the end of the twelfth century had increasingly departed from the norm of marrying into the country's indigenous noble families. Yet this was a mutual dependence. The king's friendship with Absalon was highly valuable because the bishop was a key person who could communicate

²³² C.S. Jaeger, 1999, p. 112. According to Aristotle, a man should work on himself to achieve "excellence". E. Österberg, 2008, p. 56. The ancient ideal was that virtues had to be actively practised through righteous action. M. Foucault, 2005, pp. 12 ff.

with several different networks thanks to his good connections. This position meant that people who were not a part of the king's *familia* turned to Absalon, who acted as an intermediary in establishing contacts with the king. Episodes in *Gesta Danorum* show that even royal kinsmen approached the bishop when they wanted to ask the king for a favour or a gift.²³³

8 Friendship and the Legitimation of Power

In the introduction to this study it was noted that earlier research has interpreted Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* as royal propaganda, the main aim of which was to legitimize royal hierarchical government based on vertical relations with the aristocracy. Here I have chosen to analyse the source from a socio-political perspective. The conclusion is that Saxo presents an ideal image of royal government based on friendships with a specific network of magnates, the Skjalm group.

With the story of Svend Estridsen and Bishop William, the author seeks to show that spiritual friendship was the strongest bond between people. This episode anticipates Saxo's account of the relationship between Valdemar I and Bishop Absalon and is intended as an analogy. By emphasizing the profoundly spiritual character of this friendship he aims to demonstrate that their affinity was unique and unattainable. It was a genuine emotional friendship in its purest form. What distinguishes Absalon from William is that he represents an extensive network of magnates who stood out by being bearers of specific qualities such as competence, energy, and loyalty. To prove their excellence, Saxo combines his account of spiritual friendship with a demonstration of the blessings of pragmatic friendship. Here the Skjalm clan incarnates a utilitarian ideal by representing the practical benefits of friendship.

Saxo thus presents a political ideology of consensus that brings together the crown and the aristocracy in the exercise of royal power. The bond of friendship was an essential foundation for this cooperation. Valdemar I's political successes were exclusively a result of his fruitful collaboration with his friends in the Skjalm group. The author's didactic intention is to show that members of the royal family were inept and deceitful advisors, while he simultaneously condemns the exercise of royal power via vertical bonds with people of low birth. The political interaction between Valdemar and the Skjalm group is described as productive teamwork between friends. Like Cicero, Saxo claims that friendship creates strong and reliable alliances; stronger than pacts based on

233 On the concept of intermediary see Sean Gilsdorf's study, discussed on p. 135.

kinship. The author thus cannot be interpreted as an ardent advocate of hereditary kingship. Instead it is the European doctrines of elective kingship that are held up in the work via the ideals of friendship.

Gesta Danorum should be analysed in the light of the serious tensions prevailing at the court of Valdemar I's successor. Different groups competed to belong to the king's inner circle, but the magnates simultaneously wanted to maintain their positions by liberating themselves from dependence on the king's favour. A power position that rested on the king's pleasure was unstable. Saxo's tendentious account of twelfth-century history can be interpreted as a project of social refinement with the aim of legitimizing and consolidating the positions of the Skjalm group in the tough competition in the political arena. In this context *Gesta Danorum*, by definition, represented a manifestation of cultural power, directed not only against rival indigenous aristocratic networks, but also against the growing influence of foreigners in the administration of the Danish realm. The Skjalm group represented the true elite, fully deserving of their positions close to the king. Saxo wanted to show his contemporary kings not only that these magnates were competent, but also that this group – via Absalon – was intimately associated with the king's person through a spiritual friendship. Emotional friendship attached to the individual is thus transferred to a collective political context. As in the case of Cicero's ideal of friendship, it is not possible to distinguish pragmatic friendship from spiritual friendship because one type is essential for the other. Together they work in fruitful harmony for the good of society.

Stephen Jaeger has shown that amicable love between men in the Middle Ages was regarded as one of the prime virtues.²³⁴ Edifying friendship was closely associated with elitism and esotericism.²³⁵ Only a few people in society could achieve this chivalrous virtue. The emphasis on virtues of this kind, according to Jaeger, helped to give a group identity to the ruling elite. Virtues of friendship were a way to demonstrate publicly a specific group's internal cohesion and superior position in society. The prominent role of friendship in *Gesta Danorum* could therefore be explained as an aristocratic self-manifestation. Saxo probably wanted to demonstrate the noble character of the Skjalm clan both to contemporary rulers and to future kings and magnates. The last books

²³⁴ C.S. Jaeger, 1999, pp. 5 f., 54 ff.

²³⁵ Sigríður Beck thinks that a different view of friendship emerged among the Icelandic aristocracy after the commonwealth era. The sagas of ancient times (*fornaldarsögur*) and the chivalrous sagas (*ridðarasögur*) praise the ennobling friendship between equals. Beck interprets this as part of the social formation process of the aristocracy of office, where the idea of friendship between equals in status consolidated the new hierarchical order. S. Beck, 2007, pp. 117 ff; S. Beck, 2011.

in the history are thus a germinal monument to a group of ideal partners. Valdemar I's sons exercised power via institutions to a far greater extent than was the case with their predecessors. This meant that the mutual cooperation between the Danish aristocracy and the king was gradually undermined. The praise of friendship in *Gesta Danorum* could therefore be viewed as an archaizing feature, Saxo's attempt to hold up a timeless model of the ruler as an example and a political guide for today's and tomorrow's kings.

Colin Morris's statement that the friendship ideology of the secular elite was individualistic in character in that it lacked a broader vision of society is thus not borne out by this source. The work represents the third stance of the high aristocracy in the intellectual political debate between representatives of the reform movement and the ideologues of sovereign royal power. All the actors taking part in this exchange of opinion asserted that friendship was an important element in sustaining society.

9 Summing Up

In the social formation process of the clerical elite, written culture played a crucial role in the creation of collective identity. The ideology of friendship was a part of the twelfth-century renaissance because it rested to a large extent on a foundation that had been created by the philosophers of classical and late antiquity. For the clerical aristocracy of the High Middle Ages the classical perceptions of spiritual friendship and affinity between the virtuous were of great significance for manifesting group identity. According to the visions of the reform movement, the new Christian society would be built on the message of friendship and love, and therefore the ideology had an important purpose in the constitution of society.

For the ecclesiastical elite the bonds of friendship also structured society by serving as the basis of their social organization. One reason why the clerics idealized friendship was that they lived in a decidedly homosocial environment where kinship ties were of minor importance. Writing was actively used to strengthen the internal cohesion between individuals in the clerical collective. The lively correspondence by letter meant a communicative revolution where the language of friendship was a symbolic capital in the intellectual sphere. Friendships were established and maintained by letter, which meant that the written networks also helped the clerics to build up a social capital. In several respects the written links reflected the logic of the traditional networks in that the bonds of friendship observed mutual obligations such as the exchange of favours and gifts. The language of friendship thus served both spiritual and

pragmatic purposes. It manifested norms, values, and symbols which in turn affected people's actions. In this communication the ideals of classical and late antiquity were transformed in a new context when the rhetoric of friendship functioned as a status marker and a sign that the individual was a member of the clerical elite.

The secular aristocracy's discourse of friendship has often been viewed in earlier research as having been more individualistic and more pragmatic in character. Here, however, I would stress that the secular ideology of friendship in many ways built on the same classical and Christian ideas that the clerical groups embraced. The magnates sought to legitimize their positions by virtue of tradition and by their aura of charisma. In the rivalry with other social groups and the increasingly strong princely power they asserted their position with the aid of a classical and Christian ideology of friendship. At the individual level the ideal magnate was characterized by specific virtues, with the Ciceronian ideal of friendships and trust as one of the models. The ability to practise true friendship was an innate quality that distanced the true aristocrat from his rivals.

In the competition within the aristocrats' own social stratum the relationship to the princely power played a crucial role. The victors in the struggle for the prince's favour were the magnates who possessed the correct properties, which qualified them to be their lord's true friends. Here the ideology of friendship was used in a broader political context as the secular elite asserted its traditional right to participate in the government of the realm. According to this view, the prince should reign in amicable consensus with the aristocracy. Arguments were drawn from Cicero's ethics of virtue and classical ideas about the importance of the ruler listening to his wise advisors. Friendship thus had an important societal function for groups in the secular elite.

The glorification of friendship among the magnates can be partly explained, as in the case of the clerical elite, by the fact that they spent a large share of their lives in a homosocial group culture. They legitimized their position in society by belonging to the warrior caste, whose task was to defend other groups in the kingdom against external enemies. The military fraternities hailed the concept of equality, and thus bonds of friendship were not infrequently judged to be more noble than kinship ties. The ideology of brotherhood took its ideas from classical notions of trust and loyalty. These ideals were combined with Christian brotherhood and traditions derived from ancient mythical warrior bands.

The Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus has served here an illustrative example of the difficulty of making a distinction between an ecclesiastical and a secular discourse of friendship. In his capacity as a classical representative

of the twelfth-century renaissance, Saxo combines the classical ideology of friendship with Christian ideas. He also lets his character-forming heroes epitomize both spiritual and pragmatic friendship. Like several of his contemporary European colleagues the author stands for a political ideology according to which the king should reign in consensus with his allies in the high aristocracy. The king and his true friends among the magnates are united not just by possessing the eternal Ciceronian virtues but also because of their spiritual Christian affinity, as seen in the example of King Valdemar and Bishop Absalon. Saxo simultaneously uses the ideals of friendship as a normative yardstick and is thus able to criticize kings who depart from the legitimate manner of government. This technique can thus be interpreted as part of a discursive struggle between two rival political ideas: the aristocratic consensus model and the sacral hierarchical ideology of kingship.

People with book learning were a minority in high medieval society, however, which meant that friendship as an intellectual concept was known by only a few. The political culture was mostly oral. We shall now turn to look at the function of friendship in structuring and constituting society within this culture. We thus move the focus to another arena where the forms of communication were expressed differently. Oral and visual information transfer dominated here, chiefly manifested in rituals of different forms. Friendship pacts were established through direct performative actions. This spectacle was situation-bound, enacted in a public arena before an audience, which meant that the alliances were linked to a specific context. The question is, to what extent can we make a distinction between a spiritual and a pragmatic form of friendship in this field?

Friendship in an Oath-Taking Society – A Ritual Perspective

1 The Oath-Taking Society

I intend to show here how closely the political and spiritual elements in the phenomenon of friendship were interwoven, even in the oral political culture. To illustrate the interaction of these elements, I characterize the Scandinavian and western European societies as “oath-taking societies”. I take this designation from Fredric Cheyette’s critique of the interpretation of medieval society as being held together by feudal political, economic, and legal institutions. He emphasizes instead the role of the ritual oath as a pillar of the social organization.¹ This makes it possible to place friendship in a ritual context, which means that I can show how the relationship is an important element in a process of creating social order.² Ritual friendship thus acts within an all-embracing sphere where political, social, economic, and spiritual phenomena interact. To get there, however, we must first explain the concept of an “oath-taking society”.

The image of European feudal society has undergone a fundamental reassessment in recent decades. It is primarily the narrow political interpretation of feudalism that has been heavily criticized. According to that view, feudalism is associated with a political form of government resting on contractual relations between feudal lords and vassals.³ Today, in contrast, scholars like Elizabeth A.R. Brown and Susan Reynolds argue that this “system” is largely a post-medieval construction. They think that there never was a form of government based on a fief system.⁴ Other anthropologically oriented scholars such as Stephen D. White have instead interpreted the fief in a context of gift exchange as an act of ritual identification and confirmation. It was used as part of a negotiation process whereby different lords regulated their positions in the political arena.⁵ White thus does not view the fief as an expression of a “feudal

¹ F. Cheyette, 2001, p. 195; F. Cheyette, 2003, pp. 259 f. See also H. Débax, 2011, pp. 77–100.

² For research on rituals and social order see L. Hermanson, 2015, pp. 1–42.

³ See e.g. F.L. Ganshof, 1964.

⁴ E.A.R. Brown, 1974, pp. 1063–1088; S. Reynolds, 1994.

⁵ S.D. White, 2001, pp. 181 ff.; G. Althoff, 1997, p. 202.

contract". Instead he interprets it as a gift confirming a temporary agreement: "the agreement represents a tie that was or ought to have been constructed in terms of multiple models of lordship, fidelity, and gift-giving and that was the subject of almost continuous renegotiation".⁶

Fredric Cheyette wholly avoids the term feudalism and instead launches the designation "oath-taking society".⁷ This social organization lacked a state authority and a permanent hierarchical power structure. Nor there was any absolute judicial power that could force through its demands by judicially sanctioned authority. Instead of talking of *one* uniform society there was a pluralistic society consisting of several temporary communities held together by personal bonds and shared ideals.⁸ The oath, according to Cheyette, was of crucial significance for the establishment of these communities.

Power largely rested on the construction of social networks. These constellations were in constant flux, and therefore the political structure was always moving. Those in power, however, always had to act in accordance with shared ideals and explicit or implicit rules.⁹ In this almost entirely non-literate society contractual relations had a subordinate role. Each individual was part of an extensive network, which meant that everyone had multiple loyalties. Contractual ties were therefore impossible. Relations of service had low status because they were associated with lack of freedom. The social order was regulated through feuds, negotiations, and settlements. This meant that social organizations were constantly being created, split, and re-established through different forms of conflict-regulating mechanisms.¹⁰

Since the political structure rested almost wholly on personal bonds, the concept of *fides* (loyalty, trust, sworn pledge) played a crucial role if the networks were to function at all. Trust was then aimed at a person or persons in situations where the individual could not directly control circumstances.¹¹ In this culture of trust the actors always strove to achieve the ultimate bond of

6 S.D. White, 2001, p. 185.

7 F. Cheyette, 2003, pp. 259 f.

8 On "communities", see B.H. Rosenwein, 2006; B.H. Rosenwein, 2016.

9 G. Althoff, 1997, pp. 185 f.; S. Patzold, 2000.

10 P. Geary, 1994a, pp. 137 ff.; F. Cheyette, 2001, p. 195; F. Cheyette, 2003, pp. 259 f.

11 N. Luhman, 1979, pp. 24 ff., 43 ff. Luhman says that *supererogatory* acts start trust-making processes. These acts are not performed on account of obligations but from goodwill, which makes them appear extra honourable. The acts follow the logic of the gift mechanism in that the individual who is the object of the benevolent act ends up in a debt of gratitude. The supererogatory act thus starts a chain of relations. Acts performed on account of "genuine" friendship, that is, where the bond is not intended to serve selfish purposes, could therefore be viewed as supererogatory acts.

loyalty based on an unbreakable alliance. *Fides* was equated with love, and the ideal was that the parties should be united through eternal love and friendship.¹² In the medieval sources the terms love (*amor*, *dilectio*, *caritas*) and friendship (*amicitia*) went hand in hand, intimately associated as they were with each other.¹³

These were unattainable ideals, however, since in practice it was difficult to keep faith on account of the multiplicity of loyalties. In western European society there were vassals who had sworn loyalty to over twenty lords. Matters were very similar in Scandinavia. In Iceland it was not unusual for a farmer to swear loyalty to more than one chieftain (*goði*).¹⁴ But multiple allegiances could lead to serious conflicts of loyalty, as the authors of the day were well aware. One example is Saxo Grammaticus, who viewed the phenomenon as a threat to the ideal of trust, a wicked Saxon practice that ran against Danish custom.¹⁵

The fact that the political constellations were constantly changing naturally made it harder to live up to the ultimate ideal of loyalty. Medieval people therefore employed various trust-making actions in order to appear well-meaning and sincere. There were many different means and chains of actions for creating trust. These were often long processes that acted on several levels. Religious, economic, and social elements were constantly interacting. Yet all of this took place within a framework consisting of a sacral political order in which everyone was part of a divine hierarchy. All individuals were subordinate to a superior, whether human or divine.¹⁶ The ideal was to imitate the kingdom of heaven by linking the temporal bonds of loyalty to the eternal Christian order.¹⁷ Rituals and oaths were therefore an essential foundation in social organizations because oaths could serve as the glue holding communities together.¹⁸

1.1 *Oaths and Friendship*

Trust was achieved through different forms of rituals. We should remember, however, that the term “ritual” is a scholarly construction. Ritual studies is a hornets’ nest with differing perceptions as to how to define the concept and

12 C.S. Jaeger, 1999, pp. 6, 36 f.; F. Cheyette, 2001, p. 198.

13 J. Haseldine, 1994, pp. 250 ff.

14 Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1993, pp. 280 ff.

15 Saxo, 14.33.3. Here Saxo actually lets the usurper Buris Henriksen act as spokesman for this noble stance.

16 G. Koziol, 1992a, pp. 23, 47, 77.

17 F. Cheyette, 2001, p. 206.

18 Oaths, of course, could also be used to destroy an established order.

interpret its function.¹⁹ It is impossible here to consider all the perspectives, so I choose to concentrate on the aspects that are significant in explaining the role of friendship for our purposes.²⁰ A general feature is that it was often a protracted process that led up to the ritual act itself.²¹ This was frequently performed in public, as on a stage, as a collectively witnessed manifestation. The ritual followed a fixed pattern which included, for example, special gestures, emotionally charged rhetoric, music, and the handling of sacred objects and gifts.²² The act could include swearing solemn pledges in the form of oaths. The ritual had a spiritually transformative dimension in that it linked the secular order to the divine order, which meant that it bridged time and space.²³ The act was confirmed through various symbolically demonstrative acts such as kisses, embraces, handshakes, exchanges of gifts, ceremonial meals and feasts. These confirmatory acts could be repeated several times after the actual ritual occasion.

Dudo of St Quentin (c. 980–1020) describes, for example, how the Norman duke Richard, after a long series of conflicts with his opponent Theobald, finally established an honourable pact of peace through a ritual:

And so the relics of the saints were brought up, and they entered into an alliance. The councillors of both counts likewise gave their authority to this, by the same oath of fidelity. Then the most generous marquess Richard honoured him abundantly with immense rewards and gifts. And

19 The term “ritual” was created in the nineteenth century, mainly denoting non-rational, patterned acts. S. Lukes, 1975, pp. 289–308. Jack Goody warns that the term is employed so widely today that it risks becoming unusable. J. Goody, 1977, pp. 25–35. The term “ritual” today is thus as controversial as feudalism. For a commendable attempt to define and systematize various aspects of the concept see S. Patzold, 2014, pp. 349–359.

20 For a more detailed discussion of different outlooks in ritual studies, see e.g. L. Hermanson, 2015, pp. 1–30.

21 C. Bell, 1992, pp. 90 f. See Bell’s application of the concept of “ritualization” regarding how strategies are adapted to a particular context. C. Bell, 1992, pp. 70–75. See also R.L. Grimes’s critique of Bell’s polarization of “performance theory” and “practice theory”. R.L. Grimes, 2004, pp. 109–138. On this debate see also L. Hermanson, 2012, pp. 16–17.

22 S.J. Tambiah, 1979, p. 119; E. Muir, 1997, pp. 2 ff. The objects did not need to be religious, however. They could be things of very many kinds. Jacques Le Goff refers to Charles Du Cange (1610–1688), who lists 99 different types of object. J. Le Goff, 1982, pp. 244 ff. The rituals did not need to follow fixed traditional patterns, but could be “invented” in order to establish a tradition. Yet they did have to have some form of historical reference point if they were to be meaningful. Several scholars have pointed out that rituals and traditions do not fill any function if the underlying purposes are not questioned.

23 D.I. Kertzer, 1988, p. 10.

on his departure, Theobald enjoyed the longed-for kiss and the desired embrace.²⁴

The exchange of gifts was thus both pragmatic and symbolic. It sometimes worked in interaction with the spiritual world, for example when the gift-giving was witnessed or channelled via ecclesiastical institutions such as monasteries and churches dedicated to specific saints.

The functions of the ritual could be to demonstrate ideals to aim for and to manifest – or else legitimize – a political order or a social phenomenon by sacralizing it.²⁵ The rite could be intended to generate trust and guarantee that promises were kept, which meant that the parties involved could predict each other's behaviour. It could be a way to resolve conflicts, to establish consensus and reciprocity. The ritual thus functioned as a means to communicate in the political and social arena through the public proclamation of alliances or acknowledgements – or transformations – of social status and identity.²⁶ Finally, the ritual was a way to establish an active connection with the spiritual world.

The most common ritual that we come across in the medieval source material is the sworn oath. A western European example is the chronicle by the notary Galbert of Bruges about the murder of the Flemish count Charles the Good.²⁷ Oaths are frequently sworn in this source, for example in connection with agreements about joint political action, settlements, acknowledgements of subordination, and the establishment of pacts of friendship. Galbert describes both individual and collective oaths taken by all social groups within the spectrum of *oratores*, *bellatores*, and *laboratores*.

The conflict that led to the murder of the count follows the classical pattern of the feud in several respects. Tension arose between two different networks within the Flemish elite. On one side was the circle around Charles the Good,

24 Dudo, 4.117.154. On the kiss as a symbol of a new friendship (horizontal or vertical) see M. Bloch, 1971a (1st ed. 1939), p. 146.

25 A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, 1948, p. 264; D.I. Kertzer, 1988, p. 2, p. 37; R.A. Rappaport, 1999, p. 53. Anthropologists make a distinction between “instrumental” (technical) and “expressive” (ritual, symbolic, communicative) aspects when it comes to human behaviour. Anton Blok explains the different aspects thus: “The former involve expediency and practical reason, the relation between means and goals. The latter involve meaning: what do these practices ‘say’, what do they express? The emphasis is on cultural form rather than on means and ends. Both aspects are important and closely connected. It may be useful to see this relation in terms of a continuum: some actions are more instrumental, other actions are more expressive”. A. Blok, 2001, pp. 107 f.

26 C. Geertz, 1978; R.A. Rappaport, 1999, p. 53.

27 The count, of Danish descent, was murdered in 1127. The chronicle was started in the same year and ended in 1128.

men whose prominent positions were said to be a result of their friendship with the count.²⁸ This inner circle consisted of advisors and officials belonging to the clergy, whose loyalty was solely to Charles. The other side was mainly represented by the powerful Erembald clan, which was gradually excluded from enjoying the count's friendship.²⁹ The result of this was that he would no longer recognize their social status and that he planned through a legal process to have declared them to be serfs.³⁰ The Erembald faction had developed into a "second force" in the county, which Charles the Good could not accept. These magnates, who were the count's vassals and officers, then conspired to assassinate their lord. Oaths were sworn between the plotters and the deed was performed. After the murder there was an uproar leading to political chaos and the overthrow of the social order. The aim of the conspirators was to exterminate the count's friends, one by one. They failed in their intentions, however, when the revolt was crushed and the new count, William Clito, was installed.³¹ Order was temporarily restored through the swearing of oaths, both collective and individual.³² For Galbert this is synonymous with the restoration of the

²⁸ Galbert, Chapter 16, p. 22.

²⁹ James Bruce Ross points out that the Erembald clan was mainly based on second- and third-hand blood ties, such as uncles and cousins. The clan also had powerful friends and affines all over the county. Several groups of burghers in the towns of Flanders were also attached to the clan through oaths of loyalty. J.B. Ross, 1959, pp. 367–390. However it is important to bear in mind that the Erembalds were also torn apart by inner tensions and discord, see B. Demyttenaere, 2009, pp. 174–179.

³⁰ Galbert, Chapter 7, p. 98. A process like this could seriously upset the power balance in the county. Interaction between the count and the magnates built on reciprocal confirmation of status based on honourable submission. If the clan members were declared to be serfs it was not only an affront to these magnates but also meant an end to the fundamental reciprocal element in the relationship with the count.

³¹ William Clito was grandson of William the Conqueror and Matilda of Flanders. He received massive support from the French king Louis VI but in 1128 he fell in battle against his challenger Thierry of Alsace, who remained count of Flanders until 1168.

³² Galbert, Chapter 56, p. 206. This source has been a goldmine for legal historians such as F.L. Ganshof since it serves as a kind of prototype model for feudal rituals such as doing *homagium* and swearing oaths of loyalty. To a large extent, however, these rituals have been created and systematized by legal historians, who have also illustrated the acts with suitable pictures. James Bruce Ross claims in a note that "conventional conceptions of homage and fealty dissolve when confronted with Galbert's evidence of the varied use of the pledges". She asserts that terms like *fides* and *hominium*, supplemented with *securitas*, were used to establish bonds of loyalty to merchants and burghers just as much as between feudal lords and vassals. According to Ross, in the many oaths in Galbert's work sworn between individuals or groups of individuals "the formula is generally some form of *conjurare*, *jurare* or *taxare*, with or without *fides*, *compositio*, *juramentum*, *amicitia*, *securitas*, in bewildering diversity". J.B. Ross, 1959, n. 163, p. 388. This means that it is not

sacral order as well, since the conspirators are described as “enemies of God” and the devil’s henchmen.³³

Swearing of oaths (*svardagi*, *sverja eið*) also occurs in Scandinavian and Icelandic sources such as *Sverris saga*, *Baglersaga*, *Heimskringla*, *The Poetic Edda*, *Sturlunga saga*, *Gesta Danorum*, and the legal texts.³⁴ What northern and western Europe have in common is that oaths were sworn when vertical relations were established, peace treaties were agreed, legal decisions were concluded, pacts of friendship were sealed, and temporary action groups were created. Oaths were also sworn when two lords merely wanted to confirm each other’s status and mutual respect.³⁵ Moreover, sacred oaths were the foundation for many different types of group formations such as guilds or brotherhoods.³⁶

Medieval society was conflict-ridden, with limited opportunity for people to stay politically neutral. The individual viewed other people as either friends, *amici*, the people belonging to one’s own network, or as *inimici*, those belonging to other networks.³⁷ The networks often overlapped, however, which gave rise to tricky conflicts of loyalty. This dilemma is a recurrent theme in the Norwegian-Icelandic saga material where the actors sooner or later have to choose sides. Yet the overlapping bonds also had the effect of preventing

possible to detect any fixed, general oath ritual; there was instead a limited set of ritual themes to choose from at ceremonies where oaths were sworn.

- 33 This rhetoric was commonly used about oath breakers in medieval sources. Members of the Ermbald clan, however, could probably legitimize their actions by referring to norms and rules associated with the feudal political culture in that the count had failed in his reciprocal obligations to his vassals. Charles of Flanders could thus be portrayed as representing “bad lordship”. See e.g. R. V. Turner, 1988; S.D. White, 2002; S.D. White, 2003, pp. 83–86; S.D. White, 2007, pp. 3, 14, 18. R. Bartlett, 2000, pp. 60–61; R.E. Barton, 2004; L. Hermanson, 2013, pp. 116–120.
- 34 See *Sverris saga*, 60.78, 78.99, 95.119; *Baglersaga*, p. 331; *Heimskringla*, XIV.1; *The Poetic Edda*: “Völundarkviða”, 33.103; *Sturlunga saga*, ch. 9, pp. 70, 65. 219, 129. 319, 156. 371, 157. 379, 177. 412, 192. 436; Saxo, 13.3.7, 14.2.6, 14.16.4, 14.17.15, 14.26.6, 15.3.1. Martina Stein-Wilckshuis considers oaths in the Scandinavian and Icelandic law material, such as *Grágás*, *Landnámabók*, and *Äldre Västgötalagen*. M. Stein-Wilckshuis, 2002, pp. 158, 163 ff. On oaths associated with the Norwegian judgement system, see L. Hamre, 1958, KLMN III. pp. 509 ff.
- 35 Snorri mentions in *Heimskringla* that Norwegian and Danish kings/pretenders formed sworn brotherhoods, e.g. Harald Gille and Erik Emune. *Heimskringla*, XIII.3.
- 36 See O.G. Oexle, 1990, pp. 15 ff.; G. Koziol, 1992b 239 ff.; C. Anz, 2002, pp. 24 ff.; C. Radtke, 2002, p. 51.
- 37 P. Geary, 1994a, p. 144; C. Garnier, 2000, pp. 1–13, 77–122. Medieval sources often depict conflicts in emotionally charged language, with a constant dialogue between the opposites love and hate. F. Cheyette, 2001, p. 199. There was rarely room for anything in between, but the bitterest enemies could suddenly be joined in eternal love and friendship.

conflict in that a third party could mediate in the conflicts.³⁸ Men who had sworn oaths of mutual loyalty not infrequently called each other friends, regardless of whether it was a horizontal or a vertical bond.³⁹ But it did not need to be an intimate relationship. Often it was only a symbolic, situationally determined stance they were taking. The feudal rituals of *homagium*, ritual submission, *fides*, the oath of loyalty, followed by the *osculum*, the kiss of peace (or a handshake), rarely involved a formally regulated contractual relationship of service. It is more reasonable to interpret them as situationally arranged agreements. *Consilium* and *auxilium*, that is, advice and military service, were thus not automatically included in this type of agreements.⁴⁰

The oaths could have a pacifying function, with the aim of establishing a protective relationship, *securitas*.⁴¹ The oath-taking parties then pledged only to abstain from hostile actions (*non-facere*) against each other.⁴² Perhaps the best-known example is Fulbert of Chartres' letter to Duke William of Aquitaine, who is said to have asked Fulbert to clarify the oath of loyalty (*de forma fidelitatis*). According to Fulbert, its primary purpose is that the party taking the oath should not harm his lord, but that he should also voluntarily do "good things" such as assisting his lord. Fulbert stresses the reciprocal exchange in the relationship by asserting that the lord must likewise be loyal and faithful to his vassal.⁴³ Similar oaths to obtain protection recur time and again in Galbert of Bruges' chronicle. They are also found in the Norse source material, for instance in *Sturlunga saga*.⁴⁴

In the sources the establishment of a relationship of loyalty through oath is described as a sacred act that took place on two levels. Religious objects such

38 In Iceland these mediators were called "vitirir menn" and "beggja vinir". J.L. Byock, 1988, pp. 128 ff., Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1993, pp. 200 f.

39 The term vassal, *vassi/vasalli*, was rarely used for relations of subordination. Instead a lord called his subordinates friends. G. Koziol, 1992a, p. 300. On the debate as to whether it was the territorial element (the fief) or the personal bond that was central in a vassal relationship, see L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 30 f.

40 The Norman dukes rarely did *homagium* to the French kings, only *hommage de paix*, which symbolized a pact between two equals, certifying each other's respect and status. G. Koziol, 1992a, p. 155.

41 For violence control and oath-takings see also the act called "asseurement" in E. Cohen, 1983, pp. 111–122.

42 According to Jacques Derrida, oaths were not primarily sworn to establish relations of friendship but as a strategy to prevent a hostile relationship from developing. J. Derrida, 2005 (1994), p. 86.

43 Fulbert, Chapter 51, pp. 90 ff.

44 *Sturlunga saga*, Chapter 177, p. 412.

as reliquaries or church fixtures such as crosses, chalices, and sacred books played a prominent part.⁴⁵ Swearing an oath by placing one's hands on a reliquary and speaking the name of a saint meant that the saint bore witness that the promise would be kept.⁴⁶ These situations probably generated a sacred atmosphere in which the secular world communicated with the spiritual world. If an agreement of this kind was broken, it was an offence against the saint and the sacred order. Galbert, like his contemporary chronicler, Archdeacon Walter of Théroutanne, describes oath breakers as demons and compares their perfidy to Judas or the treason of the Jews against Christ.⁴⁷ In the Norse lands no one wanted to be an oath breaker (*eiðrofi*) because such a person was condemned by the church and the judicial system alike.⁴⁸

Saxo Grammaticus tells of how King Svend Grathe of Denmark went about ensuring the friendship and loyalty of Duke Valdemar (later King Valdemar I) in his conflict with the usurper Knud Magnusen. The king is said to have come to meet the duke, accompanied by a solemn procession consisting of clerics carrying relics. Svend asked Valdemar to enter St Alban's church so that they could have a private conversation intended to gain the duke's friendship.⁴⁹ Later a settlement was reached between Svend Grathe, Duke Valdemar, and his ally Knud Magnusen. The parties agreed that the kingdom of Denmark should be divided between the three. The settlement was confirmed through an oath so that "the fear of God would impede them from breaking the agreement". They then extended their hands to heaven to call on "the Creator" as witness.⁵⁰ The agreement soon came to nothing, however, when Svend Grathe had Knud Magnusen killed at a feast in Roskilde. When he was later forced to do battle

45 The objects, however, did not always need to be symbols of Christian religion. Oath rings and weapons are mentioned e.g. in the Sagas of Icelanders and in the *Edda* in connection with the swearing of oaths and the administration of justice. M. Stein-Wilckes, 2002, pp. 163 ff. See also the Swedish Forsa ring. S. Brink, 1996, pp. 27–55. An excavation in 2007 of what is presumed to have been the site of cult and judicial assembly (dated to c. AD 200–750) at Ullevi in Upplands-Bro uncovered no less than seventy iron rings. Robert of Ely's legend (c. 1140) about the murder of the duke Knud Lavard tells of how the Danish king Niels was not guiltless of the murder because Niels and Knud had previously exchanged rings. Knud is said to have been stripped of his "holy talisman", which made him invincible. VSD: *Roberti Elgensis*, p. 240.

46 For oaths sworn on relics see e.g. Dudo of St Quentin, 4.68.98, 4.71.102, 4.76.107, 4.90.121, 4.117.154; Galbert, Chapter 51, p. 193; Chapter 55, p. 201–204; Chapter 56, p. 206–207. For the role of saints as witnesses and peace brokers see T. Head & R. Landes, 1992, pp. 1 ff., p. 6.

47 Galbert, Chapter 5, 6; Gautier, Chapter 6.

48 Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1987, p. 153; A.I. Riisøy, 2015, pp. 49–81.

49 Saxo, 14.17.10.

50 Saxo, 14.17.15.

with Valdemar, the author states that Svend ensured the loyalty of his men by making them all put their hands on a reliquary and pledge allegiance to the king.⁵¹ Saxo's account conveys a picture of the political arena also being a religious stage where political acts were performed in accordance with a regulated system of Christian norms.

Apart from excommunication, there were few judicial sanctions that could be imposed on an oath breaker.⁵² Some scholars claim that in western Europe it was chiefly the fear of God which guaranteed that agreements sealed by oath would be kept. In Scandinavia, however, the fear of God is thought to have played a subordinate role. In Iceland, for example, it was instead the risk of losing honour which ensured that oaths would be upheld.⁵³ Yet it seems doubtful whether it is possible to detect any such significant difference.⁵⁴ Rituals of subordination (supplications) according to a Christian model are mentioned in both Norwegian-Icelandic and Danish sources.⁵⁵ In Saxo oaths are associated with a regulated system of Christian norms, as throughout the work the author asserts the priority of sworn bonds above all other relations, including ties of kinship and friendship. Loyalty towards the Christian religion is always the guiding star of the righteous in *Gesta Danorum*.⁵⁶ In the Nordic diplomas oaths are mentioned in a Christian context, and breaking an oath ineluctably leads to punishment by God.

In the Icelandic contemporary sagas oath-taking occurs primarily in connection with pledges of loyalty by subordinates. This was a political strategy that became increasingly common in the period 1228–1247.⁵⁷ Icelandic society was characterized by escalating competition between different chieftains, who attempted by force and other means to concentrate their power over land and men in territories called *ríki*. The oath was used as an instrument in conquered areas as a guarantee that its inhabitants would remain loyal to their new masters. The chieftains also employed oaths to build up permanent military retinues consisting of “trusted men” (*trúnaðarmenn*) and followers

51 Saxo, 14.16.4.

52 Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, however, states that the breach of an oath (*eiðrof*) was considered a serious crime in the Norse church and in the laws. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1987, p. 153. An oath breaker or a person accused of a crime could clear his name by undergoing ordeal by fire. On this process see R. Bartlett, 1990 (1st ed. 1986); L. Hermanson, 2013, pp. 120, 128.

53 P. Habbe, 2005, pp. 153, 156 f.

54 To a large extent the Icelandic family sagas describe a pre-Christian society where Christian devotion obviously was of little importance. On pagan fear of the gods, see p. 131.

55 H.J. Orning, 2008, p. 163; L. Hermanson, 2005, p. 268. *Hákonar saga*, p. 177; Saxo, 11.7–15.

56 Saxo, 10.21.4. In Saxo it is often the people of Denmark who illustrate this righteousness.

57 Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1987, pp. 150 ff.

(*fylgðarmenn*) who had sworn loyalty to their leader.⁵⁸ In thirteenth-century Iceland, then, the oath was a phenomenon associated with subordination and vertical bonds.

Similar circumstance are also attested in the Scandinavian countries and in Flanders. Galbert of Bruges describes several rituals of subordination including solemn oaths, for example when counts or dukes are to be recognized as new lords.⁵⁹ These acts are sometimes depicted as confirmation of a voluntary vertical bond of friendship, whereby people “chose” their lord on their own initiative. Subordination could also be established through coercion, when the party taking the oath swore loyalty to a lord in order to avoid incurring his violent wrath. Galbert mentions this form of non-honourable submission especially in connection with the crushing of the revolt in the county of Charles the Good. He writes that: “William of Ypres forced all the merchants in the market to swear loyalty and fidelity to him. He held them prisoner until they had done homage and promised loyalty to him”.⁶⁰ Oaths sworn under duress were also common in Iceland and in Scandinavia, where defeated men were compelled to swear oaths to their superiors. Another common strategy to guarantee loyalty and the observance of agreements was to take hostages.

1.2 *The Language of Rituals*

If we study the Latin terminology used in descriptions of sworn pacts, we see that the term friendship, *amicitia*, is a very important component. Yet the word is constantly used in association with other central terms in a kind of complementary interaction, as in *fide et amicitia* (loyalty and friendship) or *amicitia et dilectio* (friendship and love). Let us therefore look more closely at how authors like Dudo of St Quentin and Galbert of Bruges describe the forging of pacts and peace agreements.

Dudo was probably a canon, and he composed his history of the dukes of Normandy between 996 and 1020.⁶¹ In this work it is not primarily the exploits of the Normans on the battlefield that are in focus. Instead the author prefers to glorify the achievements of the dukes in making peace through mediation and the forging of sacred “unbreakable” alliances. One example is Duke

58 Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1987, pp. 155–170. These trusted men (sometimes called “faithful friends”) were used not just for military purposes. They also acted as advisors, messengers, and mediators.

59 Galbert, Chapter 20, p. 133, Chapter 20, p. 133, Chapter 55, p. 204, Chapter 56, p. 206.

60 Galbert, Chapter 20, p. 133, Chapter 25, p. 144.

61 The dating is somewhat uncertain, see E. Christiansen, 1998, p. xv. Dudo was probably writing at the behest of the Norman duke Richard I, but he dedicated the work to his patron, Bishop Adalbert of Laon.

William Longsword's honourable mediation between the German Emperor Henry and the French King Lewis. Dudo writes:

Then at William's insistence, king Henry set out to meet him [...] When they had enriched each other with many goods and various gifts and presents, they were joined together by the counsel of the most excellent of all dukes, duke William, and were allied with a bond of unbreakable friendship and aid and comfort [...] ⁶²

Compared with Dudo's high-flown descriptions, Galbert provides a much more detailed and realistic account of conflicts in Flanders, their causes and how they were resolved. What both authors have in common, however, is that the events are placed in a Christian biblical framework. They use a language in which certain terms in interaction function as ideal types in a ritual process of peace and consensus.

Dudo's text is full of biblical aphorisms and expositions, while Galbert's language is more laconic and secular in tone. Dudo emphasizes unbreakable alliances that promise eternal love and friendship. Galbert focuses more on situation-bound relations of protection, hedged by loyalty, friendship, and security. The differences can be partially explained by the fact that Dudo represented the tenth- and eleventh-century literary and political culture whereas Galbert belonged to the twelfth century. The Frenchman Dudo was an outside observer describing events often far back in time. His works do not have the character of a chronicle with the main aim of preserving a course of events for posterity. Instead Dudo's text has a different intention, to be understood in a broader spiritual context. Galbert, by contrast, was at the centre of events and recorded them soon after they had happened. The inherent purpose of his chronicle is therefore to talk directly to a contemporary audience that was part of the political situation which had arisen after the conflicts described in the work.

The formula "now the time was ripe for swearing of friendship" occurs in the works of both Dudo and Galbert.⁶³ Similar expressions can be found in the Nordic source material, demonstrating the role of friendship at the end of a long procedure or a ritual chain. The phenomenon of friendship thus cannot be considered in isolation since it is a component in a process. This makes it difficult to distinguish and define exactly what is meant by the concept of ritual friendship without considering this broader context. In the Norwegian-Icelandic

62 Dudo, 3.54.74. This sacred covenant is probably a fictitious construction by the author. See E. Christiansen 1998, pp. xv ff.

63 See e.g. Dudo, 2.4.27.

sagas there is rarely any description of absolute friendship because the bond was always subject to negotiation. The authors depict a broad scale extending from weak to strong friendship, and the bond has to be constantly renewed by being adapted to changed circumstances.⁶⁴

In Dudo, Galbert, and indeed Saxo Grammaticus, the spiritual world is almost always present when pacts of friendship are sworn by oath. On these occasions the spiritual and the political arenas merge. The use of relics and other religious objects, together with hymns and recitations from the scriptures, sanctified the political act by elevating it to a religious place.⁶⁵ The rituals were directed by both spiritual and temporal actors.⁶⁶ They were often enacted before a large audience which in the sources represents “the people” (*populus*) who constitute a collective legitimizing body of witnesses.⁶⁷ In the Norwegian-Icelandic material it is not infrequently priests or bishops who announce pacts of friendship at the thing. This is also the case in Saxo, but the gatherings are political meetings rather than regular judicial assemblies.⁶⁸

Dudo repeatedly mentions meetings which result in the union of two parties through an “unbreakable bond of love and mutual friendship”. One example is the pact between the English king Athelstan and the Norman general Rollo. When the alliance is contracted Rollo promises: “In whatever land I shall be, I shall remain your friend, bound to you by an indissoluble bond of love”. Dudo ends the episode with the words: “By these words they were most inextricably leagued together, and after they had wonderfully enriched each other with exchange of goods, each returned to his own place with his own men”.⁶⁹

The alliance between Rollo and Athelstan serves as an ideal model of a true friendship that is both spiritual and pragmatic in character. The English king honours the obligations of the pact by sending twelve ships loaded with supplies and as many ships with warriors to Rollo for his campaign against the Frisians.⁷⁰ After a time there is a revolt against Athelstan, which leads the king to send a delegation to Rollo asking for help, with a reminder of their

64 See e.g. *Sturlunga saga*, Chapter 50, p. 196, Chapter 52, p. 199.

65 On acts of ritual cleansing of evil and the purification process performed in order to create concord after the murder of Charles the Good, see L.H. Cooper, 2007, pp. 3–26.

66 A characteristic feature of medieval political practice is that it was “patterned”. Thus the actors were both “role-bound” and “rule-bound”, so to speak. L. Hermanson, 2015, p. 15; S. Patzold, 2000.

67 Dudo, 3.47.70, 3.54.74, 4.71.102, 4.72.103; Galbert, Chapter 55, p. 204. On the *populus* as a legitimizing instrument, see R.I. Moore, 1980, pp. 49–69.

68 See e.g. *Sturlunga saga*, Chapter 50, p. 196; Saxo, 14.17.15.

69 Dudo, 2.8.32.

70 Dudo, 2.9.33.

“unbreakable” pact of friendship. The Norwegian chieftain responds to his friend’s request and comes to his aid. When they finally met again, according to the author, they “embraced eagerly and kissed each other in friendship”.⁷¹

The main characters in Dudo’s work deliver solemn speeches and promise that the bond will be so strong that it will last forever.⁷² The pact is confirmed by kisses, embraces, handshakes, and gifts.⁷³ The author writes that the Norman duke Richard, as a child, had his men swear loyalty to him through a religious ritual: “With these words, they gave their hands to the child Richard, and made their oath on the holiest relics to obey and serve and fight, and promised and vowed to be faithful to him in all things”.⁷⁴ Dudo and Galbert rarely mention vassals or feudal contractual relations. Instead they use an emotionally charged discourse revolving around trust, loyalty, friendship, and love. The pacts are surrounded by a Christian rhetoric of peace and love, where sincere emotions and morals guarantee that the alliance will be maintained.⁷⁵ This is a political love and friendship enacted in a public arena, but it is simultaneously spiritual bonds that are proclaimed, which means that the language itself is ceremonial or ritual.⁷⁶ These inviolable liaisons are contracted in a kind of tri-lateral union with God. The terminology thus shows the constant aspiration for the sacred, unbreakable bond enshrined in the Christian message of love and peace in combination with classical ideals of fidelity.⁷⁷

The language thus reflects the interaction between social order and religious ideals. Friendship here can be regarded as a “total social phenomenon”,

71 Dudo, 2.17.39, 2.18.40.

72 E.g. Dudo, 2.8.32, 2.25.46, 2.26.47, 3.49.70, 3.61.81, 3.47.69, 4.93.125.

73 E.g. Dudo, 3.54.74.

74 Dudo, 4.68.98.

75 Dudo uses formulae such as: *pax et concordia, atque amicitia firma, et stabilis atque continua* or *foedere insolubilis amicitiae et dilectionis*. Dudo (Patrologia Latina), book 11, book 111 (*concordiae* = publicly witnessed agreements which often have a judicial meaning). Galbert uses formulae such as: *componente de fide et amicitia et fidissima securitate in invicem*, Galbert (Patrologia Latina), Chapter 6. The emotionally charged rhetoric often concerned opposites such as love, friendship, peace versus hate, betrayal, war. In written accounts of oath-swearing ceremonies between Carolingian rulers, chroniclers such as Nithard use a symbolic, emotionally charged language to emphasize that the mutual loyalty between the parties was based on genuine emotions. R. McKitterick, 2015, pp. 141–159.

76 On the use of ritual language see G. Koziol, 1992a, pp. 110 ff. C.S. Jaeger, 1999, p. 23; F. Cheyette, 2001, pp. 198, 233 ff. For correctly performed rituals as representing “truth”, as opposed to manipulated “false” rituals, see e.g. P. Buc, 2001, pp. 252–253; K. Esmark, 2015, pp. 237–267.

77 Cicero’s *Laelius de Amicitia* was one of the most widely read classical works in the Middle Ages, and both Dudo and Galbert may thus have been influenced directly or indirectly by Cicero. The sources thus do not just render the events according to a biblical template but also through a classicizing filter. The same applies to Saxo.

which means that we cannot make any distinction between a purely pragmatic political friendship and a spiritual emotional friendship. The concept of *amicitia* often figures in a heavily charged emotional and spiritual terminological context together with words for love such as *dilectio*, *caritas*, and *amor*. Similar language can also be found in charters in both Scandinavia and western Europe. We are therefore justified in being sceptical about the view that medieval political culture involved contractual bonds, since in the sources it is mostly idealistic moral obligations such as fear of God and honour that serve as guarantees that the bonds will not be broken.

The “feudal contract” is probably in large measure a construction by legal historians. “Frozen” contractual relations were very difficult to establish because of the multiple ties of loyalty.⁷⁸ It is not until the thirteenth century that we can find written contracts of friendship stipulating sanctions if the agreement is breached, and various clauses with reservations concerning the contracting of the pacts.⁷⁹ On some occasions Galbert describes public recitations of documents which are then confirmed by the swearing of oaths. The documents appear to be a component of the ritual act. It is of course difficult to determine what validity these documents had outside the ritual context. Perhaps they had some form of complementary role.⁸⁰

Nor is it easy to say how the terms *fides* and *amicitia* were related to each other. Loyalty through oath was not always the same as friendship. Saxo recounts an episode where Henry the Lion asks Valdemar the Great for help in his conflict with the emperor by reminding the Danish king of the oath taken by the two rulers. Valdemar, however, replied that he was not bound by any

78 A contractual relationship, according to Bjørn Qviller, means that “one party shall not sacrifice his own interests for the other party over and above what the contract specifies. In a contract the obligations of the parties are clearly defined”. B. Qviller, 2000, p. 136.

79 In Germany these contracts became more common at the end of the twelfth century. G. Althoff, 1999, p. 100; C. Garnier, 2000, pp. 13–24, 77–122. For Scandinavia see e.g. DS 1628, DS 1629, DS 879, DS 1547. The increased use of mercenaries and *condottieri* (contractors) in the thirteenth century must have played an important part in this change. M. Howard, 1976, p. 25.

80 In the High Middle Ages written documents were often regarded as unreliable unless they were corroborated by symbolic objects such as a knife affixed to a document. M.T. Clanchy, 1979, p. 24. Witnesses were considered *prima facie*, more trustworthy than documents, since they could be examined and questioned in a way that texts could not. W. Ong, 1982, p. 96. Geoffrey Koziol has shown that charters and deeds were not just documents of events or narratives about historical events but also “artefacts or key props” which were actively used as transformative forces in the “performances” of the ritual choreography, in order to achieve a specific goal such as the recognition of a donation. The actual context in which the documents figured thus played a decisive role as important props. G. Koziol, 2012, p. 9; G. Koziol, 2015, pp. 43–61.

oath obliging him to assist Henry. On the other hand, he promised to help the Saxon duke for the sake of their old friendship.⁸¹

Here Saxo probably wanted to attach more importance to the bond of friendship than to the oath because it implied a horizontal relationship between two equals. In this context the oath may have entailed an obligation with an element of coercion or subordination. In no circumstances did the author want the Danish king to seem like a vassal of a German prince. A wording that included both *fides* and *amicitia* could have allowed some room for manoeuvre. Friendship was then a complementary essence in the relationship, as a kind of “status-regulating counterbalance”. For Saxo the provision of assistance on the basis of friendship rendered much higher status than contractual help associated solely with an oath of loyalty. Yet the author constantly stressed that friendship was subordinate to religion. Later in the work he writes that Valdemar did not want to help Henry until he had atoned for his sin (Henry had confiscated church lands) to “the church of all Christians”, which meant more to Valdemar than “the friendship of one man”.⁸² This simultaneously shows how friendship belongs to a universal Christian context.

Dudo usually praises the sacred, unbreakable pacts of friendship entered into by the dukes of Normandy. Yet the work contains some strange contradictions. The author emphasizes, for example, that the man who commissioned his work, Duke Richard, did *not* have any friends attached to him through unbreakable alliances. Why? Here Dudo probably wanted to demonstrate the duke’s independence and freedom from obligations – above all in relation to the French king and his allies, who were a constant threat to the Duchy of Normandy. Dudo puts these words into the mouth of a duke named Hugo:

Richard fights neither for the king, nor for the duke, nor does he render service to any man, but only to God. He holds sole authority over the Norman lands like a king, and he has no friends bound to him with unbreakable treaties of aid and alliance.⁸³

1.3 *Ritual Friendship in a Broader Chronological and Geographical Perspective*

The oath-taking society, however, cannot be regarded as something specific for medieval western Europe or Scandinavia.⁸⁴ Ritual friendship has occurred

81 Saxo, 15.3.1

82 Saxo, 15.3.2.

83 Dudo, 4.93.124.

84 In liturgical sources from medieval Greece and the Balkans there is a specific Christian ceremony which was performed when two men wished to confirm their close relationship before God. John Boswell has interpreted the ritual as a homosexual marriage. Robert L.

and is still found in almost all cultures. As an example we can take the Spanish and Latin American concept of *compadre* which means friend or godparent. These friends are united by an initial ritual known as *compadrazgo*.⁸⁵ This is like a wedding ritual in that it is spiritual and involves symbolic religious objects. Other examples are the mythical blood brotherhoods that are familiar from many different societies all over the world.⁸⁶ Ritual social bonds such as friendship, fostering, or brotherhood are considered stronger and more sacred in many societies than biological ties.⁸⁷ One of the supreme marks of honour is to hand over one's own child to be brought up by another family. This is not just a confirmation of powerful trust but also an assurance of future loyalty. Saxo mentions that Valdemar had his son brought up by a magnate named Peder. This special relationship he calls *peculiaris amicitiae beneficium*, a particular type of friendship.⁸⁸

Wilken, however, argues that that this concerns ritual friendship where the love that is mentioned is solely spiritual. In the Eastern Roman Empire and in Byzantium ritual friendship could be used to adopt a person, giving the adoptee the right to inherit parts of the family's assets. R.L. Wilken, 1994, 24 ff.

85 S. Gudeman, 1972, pp. 45–67. See also the role of the godfather (*compare/padriono*) in the Italian mafia. J. Dickie, 2004, pp. 85–86; R. Saviano, 2017 (first publ. 2006), p. 250. Godfatherhood is also a spiritual dualistic patron-client relationship. A. Blok, 1988 (1st ed. 1974), p. 214, n. 2; B. Qviller, 2000, pp. 138 f.

86 Saxo tells, for example, of the ancient Danish king Hadding's blood-brotherhood with the pirate Liser. Saxo, 1.6.7. Klaus Oschema claims that the narratives of blood brotherhood in the medieval sources should primarily be interpreted as a literary strategy used by European Christian authors to make a distinction between foreign ("barbarian") and Catholic Christian cultures. The ritual is said to have been practised, for instance, by the Saracens, the Byzantines, and the Irish. K. Oschema, 2006a, pp. 275–301. Saxo mentions blood brotherhood in the legendary first part of *Gesta Danorum*. When the ritual is mentioned in the Icelandic sagas (such as the remarkable *Fóstbræðra saga* from the latter part of the thirteenth century) it cannot be said to have had the purpose of discriminating against a foreign culture. It may have had a literary function in lending an exotic archaic touch to the story. Saxo mentions, for example, blood brotherhood as a custom practised "in ancient times". In several cultures, such as the Sicilian mafia culture, blood symbolizes solidarity – not just between biological relatives and "affines" (individuals related by marriage) – but also between friends and "brothers", who were transformed through blood rituals into fictitious kinsmen. A. Blok, 2001, p. 101.

87 On foster- and godparenthood in medieval Scandinavian society, see L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 129 ff., 151 ff., 180. For Iceland, see Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1993, pp. 177 ff. For Norway, see I.P. Grohse, to be published in 2019. For Europe, see J. Boswell, 1988, pp. 356 ff. Foster-brotherhood was also a widespread phenomenon in Japanese samurai culture. In the mafia culture of Sicily, coalitions known as "families" (*famigle*) are valued more highly than all other social relations, even higher than biological ties. A. Blok, 2001, pp. 87, 100.

88 Saxo, 14.16.7. This friendship is thus a part of a fictive kin relation. The institution of fostering often rested on a vertical bond of friendship which in many cases was synonymous with a patron-client relationship. J. Boswell, 1988, pp. 357 ff.; W.I. Miller, 1990, pp. 122 f., 171 ff.

In many societies ritual friendship represents an ideal for social and spiritual order, and is thus a structuring element in society. Its place in a broader spectrum of social relations has been described by the anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers in the classificatory system seen in the diagram below.⁸⁹

He states that these different relations share a common principle, “amity”, which he defines as “a moral obligation to feel – or at least to feign – sentiments which commit the individual to actions of altruism, to generosity”.⁹⁰ This is in contrast to other social relations not based on mutual understanding (“non-amiable social relationships”). Pitt-Rivers thus presents a dichotomy in which the individual’s social world consists of friends and enemies. The “amical sphere” consists of five categories: “*real*” kinship, *adoptive kinship*, *ritual kinship*, *ritualized friendship*, and *friendship unrationalized*. The fictive forms of kinship and ritual friendship are not substitutes here for biological kinship or conventional friendship. They are instead supplementary bonds with a different content.

To arrive at a deeper understanding of the concept of ritual friendship, we can look more closely at its role in ancient Greece. Gabriel Herman has studied the Greek social institution of *xenia*, which he translates as “guest-friendship”.⁹¹

The Pitt-Rivers classification system

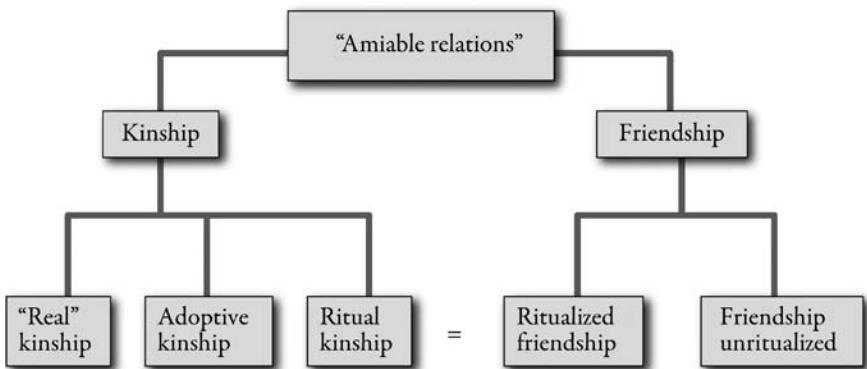


FIGURE. 5 The Pitt-Rivers classification system

King Valdemar, according to Saxo, was foster-brother of Bishop Absalon as they had been brought up together at the bishop’s ancestral farm in Fjenneslev.

89 J. Pitt-Rivers, 1973, p. 96.

90 The moral obligation, according to Pitt-Rivers, is “to forego self-interest in favour of another, to sacrifice oneself *for the sake* of someone else”. J. Pitt-Rivers, 1973, p. 90.

91 G. Herman, 1987, p. 1.

In the Greek elite it was common for men to acquire a *xenos*/guest-friend who lived in a distant place. Alongside marriage, this was the only way to procure an ally outside one's own social circle. "Ordinary friends" belonged to one's own social system, and these had been acquired through a long process of gradually developing intimacy. Ritual guest-friendship/*xenia*, by contrast, was established between people from different areas, which meant that they belonged to different social systems and thus were strangers to each other. This friendship was not achieved through long interaction, but abruptly in the form of a ritual act resembling a marriage.⁹²

The guest-friend was an important status symbol serving social, economic, and political purposes. In a social sense he was like a godfather, expected to assist his partner as a benefactor and protector in all phases of life. He often assumed the task of foster-father. The economic purpose was that the parties exchanged gifts and favours, and the political function was that they were allies and military confederates. A Greek ruler's different generals were often his guest-friends as well, which meant that conquered territories were delegated to the ruler's ritual friends. His prosperity and power were in proportion to the number of *xenoi* he had. The number of alliances a man could create through marriages was limited, whereas the number of possible *xenoi* was without limit.⁹³

Xenia could be entered into voluntarily as a horizontal liaison, for example in connection with feasts. The most common context for establishing ritual friendship, however, was war and conflict. The Greek sources recount episodes that Herman calls "encounter stories". These deal with how a former enemy is transformed by means of an initiation ritual into a ritual friend and ally. The defeated party took part in an act of pardon in the form of a ritual admission of defeat, called *hiketeia*. The former enemies swore loyalty to each other and took an oath called *pista*. The parties also exchanged ritual objects, *symbolon*, and the act was concluded through a handshake known as *dexia*. To confirm the act the new friends could eat and drink together at a special feast. The friendship was maintained through the exchange of gifts, *euergesia*.⁹⁴ These could be goods, but often it was landed property in the form of estates, known as *doreai*.

This system thus shows striking similarities to European feudal relationships such as vassal-lord relations or medieval acts of pardon and supplication.⁹⁵

92 G. Herman, 1987, p. 29.

93 G. Herman, 1987, pp. 22 ff., 26 ff., 36, 74 ff., 98 ff.

94 G. Herman, 1987, pp. 46 ff., 57 ff., 108.

95 For acts of pardoning in medieval Europe, see G. Koziol, 1992a, pp. 59–76. For Norway, H.J. Orning, 2008, pp. 172–175, 182–183, 189–192. For Denmark, L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 76, 217, 226 ff., 235 f. For Iceland, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1993, p. 269. For Norway, Demark, and

There are also several parallels to horizontal friendship pacts. Gabriel Herman points out some of these similarities, but he argues that ancient Greece cannot be regarded as feudal because the grants did not follow a fixed pattern. He also thinks that – in contrast to feudal Europe – in Greece one could be loyal solely on the basis of friendship, without receiving property from one's partner.⁹⁶ Here Herman relies on the legal historian F.L. Ganshof's interpretation of the feudal system.⁹⁷ As we saw in the introduction to this chapter, however, this picture has been challenged by scholars like Elisabeth A.R. Brown and Susan Reynolds, who claim that there was never any fixed, formalized system of fiefs.

Other scholars such as Stephen D. White interpret the fief (*beneficium*) in a context of ritual gift exchange, where a fief could serve different purposes, varying from case to case (see page 111). The Greeks' *dorea* thus shows several similarities to White's interpretation of the western Europe *beneficium*.⁹⁸ Recent research has also shown that people in medieval Europe and in Scandinavia could be loyal solely on the basis of friendship, without receiving property from one's partner.⁹⁹ Against the background of these new research findings, it is worth questioning Herman's emphasis on the differences and instead carrying on a discussion of the similarities that actually exist.

Perhaps the most significant difference is the religious context in the form of Christianity. Yet mediation, peace agreements, and the establishment of bonds of friendships and love through oaths sworn with divine authorities as witnesses are not specific characteristics of a Christian political culture. Spiritual elements were and are a part of the political arena in several cultures. The Greek gods played a prominent role both in mediation and in the initiation rites that led to the establishment of *xenia*.¹⁰⁰ The *Russian Primary Chronicle* tells of how friendship pacts confirmed through oaths were contracted between the Rus and the Byzantines on four occasions, during the years 907, 911, 944, and 971.

England, L. Taylor, 2016. On medieval uses of the term *symbolum/signum* see J. Le Goff, 1982, pp. 238 f.

96 G. Herman, 1987, pp. 164 f., 108 f.

97 F.L. Ganshof, 1964, pp. 15 ff.

98 Different forms of *beneficia* are also mentioned in the Norse source material. In the wake of the re-evaluation of feudal European society, the picture in older research of a distinctively Norse social structure, characterized by the absence of a formalized fief system, has been criticized by several Nordic scholars. See e.g. M.H. Gelting 1999a, pp. 146–188.

99 See Saxo's mention of the magnate Peder's specific friendship (*peculiaris amicitiae beneficium*) with King Valdemar, confirmed in the fact that he brought up the king's son. In this episode the author thus does not associate the term *beneficium* with any territorial element but with a specific favour. See p. 127.

100 G. Herman, 1987, p. 124, p. 52. The Roman god Dius Fidius was the god of loyalty and oaths. Perhaps he is synonymous with the Sabine god Semo Sancus. NF, vol. 8, p. 163.

The peace agreement of 944 was reached between the Rus and the Byzantine emperor three years after the attack on Constantinople by the former. The parties established a pact of friendship that would hold “henceforth and forever, as long as the sun shines and the world stands fixed”. It was confirmed with an oath where the baptized Rus swore upon the holy cross in the cathedral by the church of St Elias. If they broke the friendship they would incur “punishment from Almighty God in the shape of damnation and destruction forevermore”. The unbaptized Rus would suffer the vengeance of the god Perun (Thor) and perish by their own arms. They swore the oath by laying down their weapons in front of a statue of Perun placed on a hill.¹⁰¹ The oaths were confirmed by an exchange of gifts.

The rituals of friendship between the Rus and the Byzantines thus resemble in many ways the western European rituals. They include spiritual elements, both Christian and pagan. The parties also seek an everlasting, unbreakable friendship. We cannot say whether the pagan Rus were merely adjusting to a Christian ritual or not. There is thus a possibility that friendship rituals including spiritual elements were also practised in pre-Christian northern Europe.¹⁰²

In the northern and western European elite there were ritual bonds of friendship between people living in areas far removed from each other, which meant that they often belonged to different social systems.¹⁰³ These liaisons were established through specific acts and the relations were kept alive through different forms of gift exchange, as in the case of the Norman leader Rollo and the English king Athelstan. That having this type of distant friend was an important status symbol is also confirmed by Einhard’s biography of Charlemagne. The author writes that the emperor increased the honour of the realm through friendships with mighty princes such as Harun al-Rashid. These rulers confirmed the friendship by sending exclusive gifts to each other.¹⁰⁴ In

101 *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 944, 945, pp. 72–74. The agreement was written down on parchment and the oath was sworn on the actual parchment. In the pact of friendship that was contracted in 907 the Rus swore by Perun and Volos, the god of cattle, and by their weapons. *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 907 p. 65. Likewise, concerning the agreement established in 971, it is stated that if the Rus break the oath they will incur the curse of Perun and Volos and will be killed by their own weapons. *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 971, p. 90.

102 M. Stein-Wilckshuis discusses the occurrence of pre-Christian oaths in the Norse source material. See M. Stein-Wilckshuis, 2002, 163 ff.

103 Another example is the long-term ties of friendship between different monastic houses.

104 Einhard, 2.16.25. Charlemagne is said to have received an elephant from Harun al-Rashid. The work also illustrates another aspect of these distant bonds of friendship by citing a Greek proverb: “Have a Frank as friend, never as a neighbour”. The proverb indicates that

the Norse source material there are countless examples of similar relationships, such as the bonds between the Norwegian jarls of Lade and the Danish king.

There are also several instances of “encounter stories” and pardoning rituals in both the western European and the Norse source material.¹⁰⁵ It may to some extent have been a literary *topos*, but these phenomena probably had a background in reality because they filled an important function in the feud culture in that a pardoned enemy could acknowledge defeat with no loss of honour. The pardon was thus a mechanism for preventing conflict because the victor (it was hoped) would avoid having to deal with future avengers. Honour was thus transformed by the victor “donating” his friendship as a gift to the loser. This also created a vertical bond of dependence, according to the logic behind the institution of the gift. To apply the concept of “guest-friend” to medieval society, however, would be to exaggerate the parallel since there is no term equivalent to the Greek *xenia* in the medieval sources. An important difference that must be pointed out is that in medieval western Europe and Scandinavia it was common for ritual friends to be members of the same social system, which was not the case in ancient Greece.¹⁰⁶ The Danish scholar Bjørn Poulsen has argued, however, that the medieval trade guilds were surrounded by norms and rules of hospitality. If merchants were to be able to pursue trade in foreign areas they had to have good contacts with local friends or hosts in these places. They received the merchants as their guest-friends and thus guaranteed them peaceful trading. These lucrative commercial contacts were kept alive through generous exchange of gifts.¹⁰⁷

long-distance bonds of friendship had a solely symbolic meaning associated with status. Charlemagne's practical need of elephants was probably not pressing.

105 Perhaps the best-known “encounter story” is the folk legend of how Robin Hood and Little John became friends. Similar stories can be found in the Icelandic sagas of ancient times and chivalrous sagas, see e.g. Sigríður Beck, 2007, pp. 117 ff.

106 The power and prosperity of Icelandic chieftains who were “rich in friends” was in proportion to the number of kinsmen/friends they had over the whole island, just as was the case with the Greek rulers and their *xenoi*. The Icelandic chieftains' friends, however, were often members of the same social system. Norse concubinage was an important complement to marriage alliances. See Auður Magnúsdóttir, 2001.

107 In sources such as the town laws of Schleswig and Roskilde and the diplomas, the term “*hospites*/guest” is used. Poulsen also considers examples from the Icelandic sagas where the term *vinr*/friend is used. B. Poulsen, unpublished paper, 2015. It also seems worth considering whether these networks and guest-friends could be inherited or transferred by a companion or guild-brother if a merchant died.

1.4 *Ritual Friendship – Text and Practice*

We must always be sceptical when we consider how the medieval sources describe political agreements and treaties. These occasions are portrayed by Christian authors like Dudo and Saxo Grammaticus as ritual dramas in accordance with a biblical frame of reference, where the authors' heroes are depicted as righteous rulers acting in accordance with Christian ideals and a sacral political order.¹⁰⁸ The narrative sources thus often convey an ideal image that perhaps had no counterpart in practice. Several scholars have emphasized that the ritual does not describe the world as it is but as it ought to be.¹⁰⁹ It is thus possible that the medieval authors merely present their visions of a political order. Philippe Buc urges caution in using the concept of ritual when interpreting medieval texts. He argues that "there can only be anthropological readings of (1) of medieval textual practices or perhaps (2) medieval practices that the historian has reconstructed using texts, with full and *constant* sensitivity of their status as texts".¹¹⁰ Buc underlines the importance of textual criticism in the interpretation of medieval accounts of rituals, which makes it important to see the context in which the sources were created. The prevailing power relations play an important role for how the rituals are described. Texts, according to Buc, are always manipulations, and thus it is often "ritual-in-text rather than ritual-in-performance that best legitimizes or delegitimizes".¹¹¹

108 See Dudo's portrayal of Richard I as an ideal ruler. Dudo, 4.100.137.

109 See e.g. J.Z. Smith, 1982, pp. 57–65.

110 P. Buc, 2001, p. 4.

111 P. Buc, 2001, p. 8. Geoffrey Koziol vehemently rejects Buc's critique of the way historians used the concept of ritual. He thinks that Buc's book is full of sweeping criticism which shows that the author has fundamentally misunderstood how modern research on the Middle Ages views the phenomenon. According to Koziol, Buc imputes a structural-functionalist perspective to these scholars (represented e.g. by Radcliffe-Brown and Evans Pritchard) which was current in the first half of the twentieth century. In today's hermeneutically oriented ritual studies (inspired e.g. by Bourdieu, Dumont, Foucault, and Godelier), which focus on practice and strategy, textual critique is a matter of course. According to Koziol, this seems to have completely escaped Buc's attention. Instead he tries to take over the findings of earlier research by presenting them as his own, the only difference being that he rejects the actual word "ritual" in his studies. Koziol is relentless in his critique of Buc when he claims that: "You cannot criticize historians, then take over their positions and claim them as your own, least of all simply by putting the word you criticize in quotation marks [...]. It is astonishing that a writer so intelligent can have such blind spots". G. Koziol, 2002, p. 377. On the way in which medieval texts can be used to study ritual practice, see G. Althoff, 2002, p. 87. The debate is also summarized in L. Hermanson, 2015, pp. 18–21.

Dudo's history of the dukes of Normandy, for example, is not a reliable source for historical events. Several of the solemn agreements the author describes probably never happened, and he resorts to biblical and ceremonial tones in his endeavour to portray the Norman dukes as princes of peace in keeping with a Christian ideal. They are thus described not primarily as victorious warlords but rather as successful mediators, for instance brokering peace between the French king and the German emperor. For Dudo the mediator is the actor with the highest status, and it is he who takes the initiative for the friendship rituals. This in turn means that the mediator is the director of the ritual, the person who ultimately carries out the performative act, sealing the pact of friendship.¹¹² Casting the roles on these sacred occasions is very important for the author. The initiator of the ritual is also the person who steers history in the right direction.¹¹³

This classical outlook on history is also represented by Saxo. Valdemar I and Bishop Absalon are given honourable assignments to broker peace on several occasions.¹¹⁴ In *Gesta Danorum* it is virtuous persons who serve as paragons of morality and ethics.¹¹⁵ Authors in courtly culture were heavily influenced by the Roman ideals expounded by writers like Cicero and Seneca, and both Dudo and Saxo therefore combine elements from classical sources with biblical examples.¹¹⁶ For these authors the exact course of historical events was of

112 Performative acts, according to John L. Austin, are words that not just describe but also bring about what is proclaimed. An example is the constitutive act of marriage, which only comes into force when the officiant pronounces the couple to be "man and wife". J.L. Austin, 1975 (1st ed. 1955), pp. 5 f. Criticism of Austin's theory has been voiced by Jacques Derrida, who emphasizes the instability and capriciousness of speech acts. J. Derrida, 1988, p. 15. On the performative force of oaths see G. Agamben, 2011, pp. 54–56; S. Nauman, 2017, pp. 21–23. On rituals as "performative acts", see R.A. Rappaport, 1979, pp. 176–197; S.J. Tambiah, 1979. On studies of performative acts in twelfth-century England and France see e.g. G. Koziol, 1995, pp. 124–148. The obligatory intervention of a priest was not made a condition of a valid marriage until the Tridentine Council in the sixteenth century. In medieval canon law, the constitutive act of marriage was the spouses' pronouncement of the marriage vows in the present tense (*verba de praesenti*).

113 Buc states that medieval authors often describe ceremonial occasions in order to establish supremacy and therefore do not depict the acts neutrally. Instead they emphasize "the *mysterium*, the vertical axis connecting the event to providential history and scriptural antetypes". This *mysterium* is thus the inherent meaning of the text. P. Buc 2001, p. 252. On rituals, role assignment, performativity, and the concept of "agency" see L. Hermanson, 2015, pp. 1–6, 10–21.

114 Valdemar is asked, for example, to mediate between Svend Grathe and his antagonist Knud Magnussen. Saxo, 14.17.10.

115 L. Hermanson, 2005, pp. 265 f.

116 On the adoption of Cicero's ideal of friendship in courtly culture, see e.g. C.S. Jaeger, 1999, p. 127.

secondary importance. The crucial thing was that the texts were meaningful in that they contained edifying episodes which functioned as elements in a historically grounded reference system.

Dudo's and Saxo's emphasis on the prominent position of the mediator is thus incorporated in a Christian frame narrative, but it probably reflects the political conditions of the time. In anthropological research on networks and friendships, scholars such as Jeremy Boissevain have stressed the role of the mediator. He exercised power by occupying a central position where communications were channelled through him.¹¹⁷ In a medieval context we must also notice that the mediator, as director of the act of ritual friendship, may also have had an important position in the spiritual channels of communication.¹¹⁸

Yet the mediator's function was not merely to resolve conflicts between parties who had hostile relations to each other. Sean Gilsdorf, in a study of the Carolingian and Ottonian elite, has shown how certain persons acted as intercessors to establish favourable relations between parties who had not had close contacts.¹¹⁹ One essential condition for being able to intercede was that the person had close affective bonds with both sides. Relations were often established via vertical bonds where the intercessor spoke on behalf of his client to the other party.¹²⁰ These people thus played a very important political role in their capacity as agents who constructed networks and thereby exercised control over the political game. In modern-day language the trust-making triad could be described as a "win-win situation", but it was the mediator who was the key to the relationship since it could only be achieved and continue to function with him or her.¹²¹ This circumstance meant that successful mediations had the result that the intercessor could gain increased prestige and influence in the political field.

The narratives in the sources about the taking of sacred oaths could also be used to denigrate an adversary. A person who had sworn an oath, for example

¹¹⁷ J. Boissevain, 1978, pp. 41 ff.

¹¹⁸ In both the Norse and the western European sources, bishops and priests often have a mediating role.

¹¹⁹ S. Gilsdorf, 2014, pp. 19; 25; 37; 45; 53; 61; 147. On mediation and settlement procedures in Scandinavia see e.g. P. Andersen, 2013, pp. 165–179; J. Sigurðsson, 2013b, pp. 123–135.

¹²⁰ Gilsdorf emphasizes, however, that "Intercession [...] was a manifestation not of lordship, but of community – an act of support by the members of a political unit [...] or a social group [...] for one of their own". The acts establishing the relationship were thus surrounded by discourse of *amicitia* centred on horizontal bonds, as opposed to hierarchical relations based on dominion, *auctoritas*. Gilsdorf, 2014, p. 53.

¹²¹ Gilsdorf emphasizes that queens (*consors regni*) often acted as intermediaries in their capacity as affines with bonds of affection and obligation to different networks. Gilsdorf, 2014, pp. 114–124.

by placing a hand on a reliquary and then breaking the oath, was eternally damned according to the Christian view.¹²² The oath breaker was thus a symbol of moral decay and the antithesis of a virtuous person. This could be used for propaganda purposes, as when Dudo describes Arnulf, the killer of the Norman duke William Longsword, as an impenitent oath breaker.¹²³ Perhaps the most famous oath breaker in Norman literature (and art) is the English king Harold Godwinson.¹²⁴ A Nordic example is the Danish prince Magnus Nielsen, who is said to have been the murderer of his cousin Knud Lavard (father of Valdemar the Great). Sources like Robert of Ely, *Knudlavardslegenden*, and Saxo describe the prince as an oath breaker because he was allied to Knud as his godson.¹²⁵ This legitimized the revolt against royal rule, represented by Magnus Nielsen and his father Niels.¹²⁶ The medieval sources are full of Judas-like oath breakers.¹²⁷ Since so many oaths were sworn, there was a high probability that a person would sooner or later break an oath. This explains why the violation of an oath is such a common theme in the hostile propaganda. It was also a literary technique for dividing the characters in the story into the good and God-fearing people on one side and the wicked henchmen of the devil on the other.

2 Summing Up

This chapter has dealt with the performative side of friendship by discussing how alliances were made public with the aid of ritual acts. The rituals served

122 Similar perceptions of oath breaking as desecration appear to have existed among the pre-Christian Norse. See p. 120. See also the discussion on the Roman concept *homo sacer* in G. Agamben, 1998.

123 Dudo, 3.59–61.80, 3.64.84, 4.93.124.

124 See how the Bayeux Tapestry depicts Harold's oath in e.g. E. Carson Pastan & S.D. White, 2014, fig. 13, p. 343. See also how Guillaume of Poitiers (1020–1090) describes the swearing of the oath. Guillaume of Poitiers, pp. 71, 77, 101.

125 L. Hermanson, 2000, p. 96. The German priest Helmold states that Magnus and Knud had previously arrived at a reconciliation (*pacta*) confirmed by oath. SRG: *Helmold*, Chapter 50, p. 99.

126 Saxo is selective in his mentions of oaths. For example, he chooses not to say anything about whether Duke Valdemar was linked to Svend Grathe by oath. At their meeting in St Alban's church all that is described is a conversation between the king and the duke. Nothing is said about the swearing of oaths on the relics preserved in the church.

127 Yet another example is the members of the Erembald clan, who planned and carried out the murder of Charles the Good of Flanders. They are described by Galbert as "God's enemies" and "the spawn of the devil". Galbert, Chapter 1, 2, 3, 14. For a more detailed discussion of loyalty, treason, and oath breakers see L. Hermanson, 2013, pp. 107–140.

to constitute and structure society because they were an important element in the creation or restoration of social order. The accounts of these acts in the sources resemble in many ways the ceremonies that were (and still are) performed to establish a Christian marriage. Pacts of friendship had a voluntary foundation and were established in a triad that included God. They were sacred, unbreakable alliances contracted in the presence of divine and mortal witnesses. Like the officiant at a wedding, the mediator often carried out the performative act in that it was his words that activated the holy union.¹²⁸ In an act of marriage, the spouses confirm their indissoluble bond through a symbolic kiss. This was also the case with the oath-taking parties, who publicly declared their alliance through kisses and embraces.

Ritual friendship pacts in sources like *Dudo of St Quentin* serve to constitute society by reflecting a holy order. The medieval sources depict ceremonies performed in a mainly oral culture, but they render these events in writing, which means that, in the words of Philippe Buc, they may have been principally “rituals in text”. The tendentious sources thus often convey ideal images presenting the exemplary story of the author’s own heroes. These narratives are coloured by an ideology of friendship communicated through classical filters and biblical frameworks.

In this chapter, however, I have cited a number of examples to show that the medieval texts display a striking uniformity as regards certain recurrent features of ritual friendship pacts. In western European, Scandinavian, and Russian sources the rituals are depicted as both religious and political acts. Similar traits can be found in other social organizations, as for instance in ancient Greece. Rituals to establish trust thus play an important part in political cultures where the institutional exercise of power is weakly developed.

The conclusion is that applying the dichotomies of political–pragmatic friendship versus spiritual–emotional friendship runs the risk of giving an incomplete and distorted picture of how pacts of friendship were viewed and used in the High Middle Ages. There was active interaction between the political and spiritual elements when bonds of friendship were established by oath. I therefore think that the two orientations in research on medieval friendship can be combined. One of several possible methods is to analyse ritual friendship as a total social phenomenon. Ritual friendship was enacted in an all-embracing sphere that included religious, political, social, and economic elements. These cannot be separated from each other because they interplayed. This pattern of interaction can be simplified in the following model:

128 For research on performative acts, see L. Hermanson, 2015, pp. 1–40.

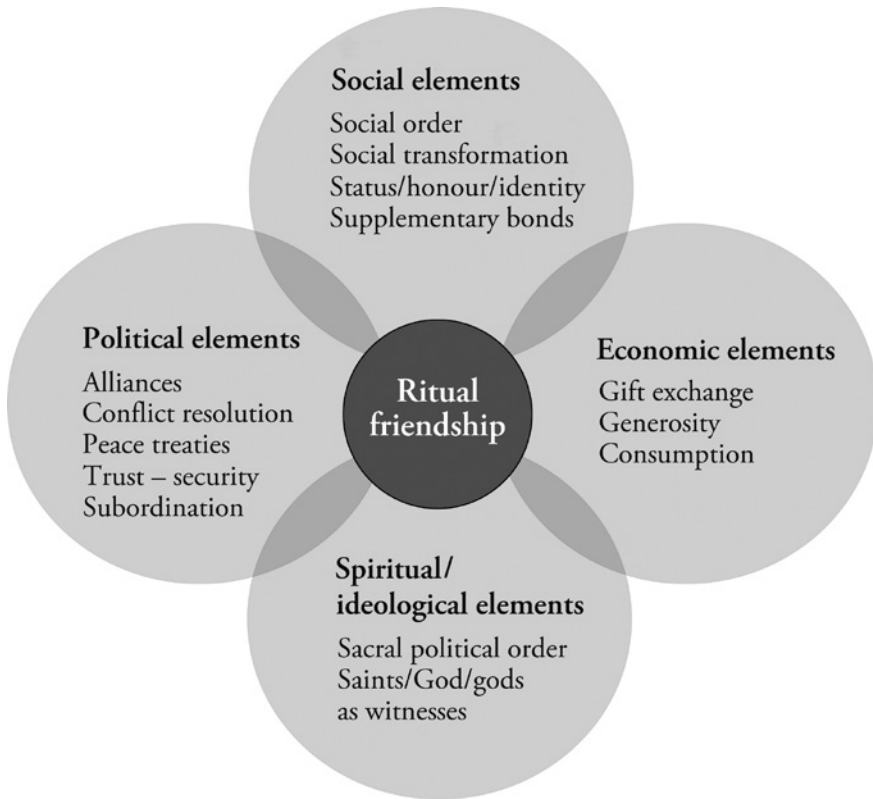


FIGURE. 6 Ritual friendship as a “total social phenomenon”

Medieval political organization was thus affected to a large extent by people’s beliefs, norms, and ideals. Yet a fixed hierarchical order for the state still existed mainly on a theoretical level, and therefore the Christian ideals were adjusted to the conflict-ridden society of the time. Here a friend was not just a political ally but also a spiritual ally if the bond had been established through a religious oath.

A criticism that can be levelled at Cheyette’s description of medieval society as an “oath-taking society” is that he never explains in depth *how* and *why* this society changed and what came afterwards.¹²⁹ In several European realms in the latter part of the twelfth century there was a gradual transition from traditional lordship based on indirect exercise of power via personal friendships,

¹²⁹ For a thorough analysis of changes in European political culture in the High and Late Middle Ages, see J. Watts, 2009. For a study of the role of oaths in early modern society, see S. Nauman, 2017.

to institutional forms of government resting on relations of service. Through time this process fundamentally transformed the social and political structure.

How did royal power go about legitimizing this new hierarchical form of government? We have hitherto chiefly considered the discourse of friendship from the perspective of the clerical elite and the secular aristocracy. Let us now look more closely at the relationship from a royal point of view. In this connection I proceed from the thesis that even royal power combined the spiritual ideology of friendship with pragmatic political purposes. Kings were obliged to act in line with existing structures and to transform them for new contexts. Ritual practices and established ideologies then had to be adapted and transformed in order to legitimize, not just a new form of vertical power, but also a new political organization. Princes therefore strove to distance themselves from the oath-taking society's constant renegotiation of personal relations. Instead they sought to establish a permanent political system where negotiation and consensus had to give way to subordination and respect for divinely sanctioned royal power.

Friendship and Lordship in Twelfth-Century Scandinavia

1 Different Forms of Government

Previous chapters have mainly concerned horizontal bonds of friendship. In ancient and medieval societies, however, it was normal for vertical relationships based on different forms of subordination to be described as friendships. The term *amicus* was frequently used in connection with asymmetrical power relations. In the forms of greeting (*salutatio*) employed in medieval documents, princes often called their subjects friends. Friendship terms were used to describe the feudal lord's bonds with his vassals and counsellors.¹ The Icelandic chieftains' subject farmers were tied to their lords through bonds of friendship. Among intellectuals, the relationship between mentor and disciple was one of friendship. The same was true in classical Greco-Roman societies where the vertical ties between patron and clients were described in terms of friendship.

Medieval society was thus permeated by different forms of hierarchical relationships in which all the individuals were *fideles* to some superior. This meant that the term *amicus/amici* could generally be used of a relationship where a free man or a collective had submitted to a lord with no loss of honour. The relationship always had an element of reciprocity and voluntariness, although this varied depending on the context. From the subordinate's perspective, the lord's friendship could mean protection and security, but also dependence and thus a restriction of personal liberty. Seeking the protection of a person in power was often an act compelled by necessity, and the subordinate had little freedom of choice. From the perspective of the superior, friendship with people of lower status could be a means of control and support. It gave control because the friends were made dependent on the benevolence of the superior, which meant that he could demand their loyalty and predict their actions. It gave support because the friends were important social and symbolic capital, which was essential for maintaining a position of power in competition with other leaders.

1 The word *vassal* originally meant "young boy" and it can be associated with the patriarchal hierarchy of the household. A feudal lord often called his military followers "my boys". M. Bloch, 1971a (1st ed. 1939), pp. 155 f.

The discourse of friendship that was used in connection with relations of subordination in pre-modern society seems alien to us today. In our society friendship is primarily associated with an emotional relationship between equals. It therefore seems natural to interpret the medieval vertical discourse of friendship as a way to disguise hierarchies. This must in turn have meant that the terminology was merely an expression of social conventions, where service and subordination were camouflaged as friendship and reciprocity.² According to one such conflict-related interpretation, the terminology of friendship is only a rhetorical legitimizing instrument in the hands of the superior party, and the relationship is in fact a classical one of exploitation.³ In this connection, however, we must observe that hierarchies are built up in many different ways and that medieval vertical power structures often followed a logic that was essentially different from that of modern society.⁴

In Europe the twelfth century saw the start of a thoroughgoing change in the political structure. A traditional form of lordship based on indirect rule via bonds of friendship was gradually replaced by a system of rulership resting on direct government based on relations of service. In the traditional society the king's position was grounded on horizontal and vertical bonds of friendship with the aristocracy, which mean that his power was built up from below and thus depended on reciprocity. In the new Christian-sanctioned kingship "by the grace of God" the king had been delegated his office by God, which meant that his power came from above.⁵ According to this ideology, the king was entitled to demand the unconditional obedience of his subjects, and thus the element of reciprocity between the ruler and the ruled could no longer be

2 Sharon Kettering has observed of patron-client relations in early modern France that: "We must recognize that the language of patronage does not always provide reliable evidence of actual behaviour, and that patrons and clients sometimes wrote one thing and did another". S. Kettering, 1992, p. 851. The same was true of vertical bonds of friendship in the Middle Ages.

3 See e.g. S. Votinius, 2004, pp. 96–112. The philosopher of law Votinius criticizes the functionalist consensus perspective as represented by medieval historians such as Marc Bloch (who was a good friend of Émile Durkheim) and David Herlihy. The author, however, does not base his critique on his own empirical studies and he never takes a stance on the interpretations of vertical friendships in modern research with an orientation to legal anthropology.

4 This also applies to the early modern period. Friendship and lordship then was based on mutual loyalty, and so the two concepts were not regarded as opposites. On the contrary, according to Gunner Lind they were so closely akin that it was difficult to tell them apart. The ideal for superiority and subordination was a patron-client relationship based on emotional affinity. Lind compares the early modern outlook with today's ideal of superiority and subordination resting on a firm bureaucratic hierarchy following set rules. The author proceeds here from Weber's bureaucratic ideal type. G. Lind, 2007, pp. 238 f.

5 The doctrine in which kingship was equated with an office was developed by the church, which meant that clerical offices served as a model. S. Bagge, 2010, pp. 158–160; 164–170.

taken for granted. It was instead to be considered an honour if a man was given the favour of serving the king. Within this hierarchy, relations of subordination had to be permanent and institutionally formalized – unlike the traditional power structure in which relations between lord and subject were personal, informal, and changeable depending on the context.

The gap between ideology and practice was wide, however. Western Europe in the Carolingian era idealized a Christian hierarchical order, but in practice political rule rested in large measure on a partnership between the king and the aristocracy.⁶ As for the Holy Roman Empire under the Ottonians, Timothy Reuter has observed that “Ottonians ruled, but did not govern. [...] The public order was one of norms rather than institutions”.⁷ The distinction between “ruling” and “governing” is also of crucial significance when it comes to clarifying the difference between traditional lordship and the new divinely sanctioned kingship.

In early twelfth-century Norway, for example, there was no overarching royal government on a territorial basis. Instead the king's power rested on lordship over a number of powerful subjects who had sworn friendship and loyalty to the king. They recognized his supremacy but governed more or less independently within their own temporary domains. In the latter part of the thirteenth century, however, the king had at his disposal an administrative apparatus based on offices and relations of service. He could thereby exercise direct territorial government, comprising almost the whole country, with the aid of officials.⁸

In this chapter friendship will be analysed from a power perspective. I have chosen to focus on Scandinavia in the twelfth century, which was a phase of transition from one type of rule to another. This change has traditionally been described as a process of state formation, but here we shall not primarily study the development of the state, but instead the change in the fundamental political principles of subordination. The emphasis is on the great significance of friendship as a power-structuring element. We shall proceed from the king's perspective by asking the question how he used friendship, in collaboration with the church, in his exercise of power. How was it possible to be lord and friend at the same time? To be able to answer this question, we must also study the vertical bond of friendship from the viewpoint of the subordinate. The

6 G. Koziol, 1992a, 23 f.; J. Canning, 1996, pp. 60 ff.

7 T. Reuter, 1997, p. 182. On lordship/*Herrschaft* see also G. Althoff, 2005.

8 David Brégaint has studied how the Norwegian kings, parallel to the increased territorial influence, gradually infiltrated the different strata of society by developing a communicative system based on rituals and the written word. D. Brégaint, 2015.

relation will then be examined from both a conflict perspective and a consensus perspective.

The investigation begins by clarifying how the king was dependent on bonds of friendship in traditional society. I then discuss the breakthrough of the Christian ideology of lordship. Did friendships play any part in this ideology, or were they incompatible with the new hierarchical government? During this transition phase, rulers were forced to balance between acting in line with the norms and values of the old society, while simultaneously endeavouring by various means to change its fundamental power structure. A crucial question here concerns the strategies applied by the kings to counter tradition with innovation.

Consequently, we shall look more closely at how the new government was adapted to the norms of traditional society and how the kings, in collaborating with representatives of the church, tried to turn theory into practice. One way to do this is through a case study of the Danish kingdom, where I examine how the Valdemarians related to the collective bonds of friendship and the medieval group culture. I end by discussing whether we can talk of a break in power relations or if there may have been a long time with different forms of lordship existing in parallel.

2 Friendship as a Form of Lordship – The Power Structure of Traditional Society

The designation “traditional society” or “traditional social organization” is often used by historians, anthropologists, and sociologists to denote the pre-state society.⁹ We should be aware, however, that the roots of this typology are linked to an evolutionary view of history, where the degree of state development is a yardstick of a society’s civilization. According to this outlook, a society undergoes a more or less regular development by passing through different stages on an evolutionary ladder. Fredric Cheyette says that historians inspired by structural functionalism, such as Marc Bloch and Georges Duby, tended to interpret social history in Darwinist terms by identifying different types of societies in a “sequence of species”.¹⁰

With this perspective there is a risk that the historian will strive solely to expose a linear development from one type of society to another, which rules

9 The foundation for this outlook was laid by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies. F. Tönnies, 1988 (1st ed. 1887).

10 F. Cheyette, 2003, pp. 244 ff.

out studies of parallel forms of social organization and action-related actor perspectives. We should thus be cautious when using the terms “traditional society” and “state society” by being aware of the implications of a strictly linear or species-related approach.¹¹ With these reservations in mind, however, the designation “traditional society” will be employed as a methodological tool to make it possible to clarify the difference between different forms of political organization.

Nordic medieval research has been – and is – to some extent affected by a view that the state is the goal of historical development. Under the influence of the Germanistic school in Germany, earlier research described the pre-state Scandinavian countries as “kinship societies”.¹² Here kin affiliation was the foundation of the social organization and the political structure.¹³ When conflicts arose, solidarity with the kindred overshadowed all other ties of loyalty. Today the majority of Nordic medieval scholars view the kin society (in its Germanistic interpretation) as a construction that cannot be confirmed by the written source material.¹⁴ Instead a picture emerges of a bilateral kinship system that reckoned kindred relations through both sexes. This meant that each individual belonged to different kin groups, as a result of which kin belonging was relative and dependent on changing political circumstances.¹⁵ The individual could thus be selective in choosing which kin identity gave the greatest personal benefit in the political game.

Within this flexible system, other personal ties such as friendships and fictive kinship relation played at least as important a part as biological relations. Research has shown that the medieval sources often describe an ally as both kinsman and friend, which shows the complementary functions of the

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- 11 John Watts thinks, for example, that it is not possible to see a development whereby centralization and institutionalization in the High and Late Middle Ages helped to stabilize and simplify political relations. Instead political life became even more complex because a great many power centres had arisen at different levels in society, which different actors could use to assert their rights. J. Watts, 2009, pp. 34–42.
 - 12 For the Germanistic view of the kindred, see T. Lindkvist, 2010, pp. 291–300. Lindkvist says that the Swedish term *ätt* (which derives etymologically from *eiga*, ‘own’) actually denoted belonging. Invocations of kinship could vary depending on context. In thirteenth-century Sweden the kindred or dynasty played an increasingly important role in legitimizing power.
 - 13 See e.g. A.O. Johnsen, 1948.
 - 14 The Germanistic view of the kin society still plays an important part in certain archaeologists’ explanatory models. See e.g. J. Runer, 2007.
 - 15 For research on the medieval Nordic kinship system see O. Fenger, 1983; C. Winberg, 1985; K. Hastrup, 1985; B. Sawyer, 1986; T. Vestergaard, 1988, pp. 160–193; L.I. Hansen, 1999, pp. 23–55; L.I. Hansen, 2000, pp. 103–132; M.H. Gelting, 2000, pp. 133–165; L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 7–12; H. Vogt, 2005; T. Lindkvist, 2010.

relationships.¹⁶ Kinship was in itself no guarantee of loyalty. In this society the leaders did not primarily possess power on the basis of formal roles or descent. Instead power was a result of intensively cultivated but constantly changing systems of personal contacts.¹⁷ These networks or coalitions were temporary in character.

2.1 *Power Built Up from Below – The Power Basis of Icelandic Chieftains*

In recent decades, several scholars have emphasized the central role of friendship as a power-structuring element in Nordic medieval society.¹⁸ Studies of the Icelandic sagas by researchers like William I. Miller, Jesse L. Byock, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Helgi Þorláksson, and Auður Magnúsdóttir have been important in clarifying the function of friendships in a society that lacked a centralized political apparatus.¹⁹ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson has shown how Iceland's chieftains (*goðar*) based their positions on horizontal and vertical bonds of friendship.²⁰ They built up their power from below by recruiting followers among the farmers. Because of the continual feuds among the most powerful men, the farmers were forced to seek the protection of one or two chieftains by establishing vertical bonds of friendship. The power and prestige of the chieftains was in proportion to the size of their groups of friends among the farmers. A *vinsæll* chieftain was a successful leader with many friends. It was therefore of the utmost importance to recruit clients among the farmers through lavish feasts, gifts, and concubinage. Auður Magnúsdóttir has investigated how women were used as gifts to confirm friendship between men by establishing relations of marriage or concubinage between the parties. Concubinage relations

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- 16 See e.g. L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 111, 113, 120; Auður Magnúsdóttir, 2001, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 2007, pp. 91 f. Several scholars have also underlined the difficulty of making clear distinctions between bonds of kinship and friendship in the medieval source material. The Old High German word *frunt* (modern German *Freund*), for example, was used alternately to designate a friend, ally, or kinsman. These overlaps can also be found in Latin. Donald L. Bullough, 1969, pp. 3–18. In Old Norse the term *frændi* is used in the same way as in Old High German. Since I examined the relationship of friendship to kinship in a different book (L. Hermanson, 2000), I need not consider this problem here.
- 17 See J. Boissevain's critique of the structural-functional picture of society as consisting of a system of permanent groups composed of status and roles and with values and sanctions to keep the system in balance. He would instead see society as a process rather than a static, self-regulating system. J. Boissevain, 1974, pp. 4 f.
- 18 For Norway see e.g. S. Bagge, 1991, 1999; H.J. Orning, 2008. For Denmark see e.g. L. Hermanson, 2000, 2005.
- 19 W.I. Miller, 1990; J.L. Byock, 1982, 1988; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1993, 1995, 2007; Auður Magnúsdóttir, 2001; Helgi Þorláksson, 2001, pp. 91 ff.
- 20 Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1989; 1993; 1999a; 2007, pp. 81–100. In the Icelandic sources the terms used are *vinr* (friend) and *vinátta* (friendship).

created vertical bonds of friendship with the farmers' families. The alliances were stable and often persisted even after the chieftains had married and returned the concubines to their families.²¹ The chieftains combined these groups of friends with horizontal friendships with other chieftains. Such coalitions, however, were often limited in duration and ended when they had fulfilled their purpose.

The power of the chieftain was never absolute since the bonds of friendship – the basis for his power – always entailed a varying degree of reciprocity. The relationships had to give something in return if they were to survive. A chieftain who had no political success and failed to protect his clients could quickly lose their friendship if they chose to support a different chieftain. The chieftains therefore had to work constantly to keep the friendships warm. This could be done by generous gifts and by keeping feuds alive.²² Just as in mafia culture, relations of protection were dependent on force if they were to have any purpose. A successful chieftain thus had to get involved in – or create – conflicts all the time so that his group of friends would function. The motive force of the feuds was usually to defend or acquire honour.

From the farmers' point of view, the vertical bonds of friendship represented, in part, a coercive relationship, in that they were forced to seek the protection of the chieftains on account of the feuds, but at the same time the farmers also had some freedom of choice in that they could transfer their support to another chieftain, albeit with a calculated risk of life and limb.²³ Yet it was not so risky if their former lord's power had been significantly weakened. The bonds of friendship had thus – unlike kinship ties – the advantage that they could be quickly dissolved if they no longer served their purpose. This, however, applied primarily to horizontal pacts of friendship between magnates. The vertical bonds of loyalty between chieftains and farmers were far more stable in character.²⁴ Scholars like Jesse L. Byock, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, and Auður

21 Auður Magnúsdóttir, 2001, pp. 47 ff.; Sigríður Beck, 2007, pp. 117 f. See also Jan Rüdiger's problematization of the view of medieval marriage. J. Rüdiger, 2010, pp. 77–116.

22 Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 2007, pp. 83 ff.; Helgi Þorláksson, 2001, pp. 91 ff.

23 If a farmer, or a group of farmers, had sworn friendship to two chieftains (*beggja vinir*), this meant that the chieftains' groups of friends overlapped. People who had contacts with both sides were often used as mediators, which meant that the overlapping groups could have a peace-keeping function. J.L. Byock, 1988, pp. 128 ff.; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 2007, pp. 86 f. The Icelandic sagas show, however, that it was not only the chieftains who instigated and pursued feuds. Farmers too were involved in feuds with each other and then often sought the support of their chieftains. A similar logic can be found in cases where Icelandic chieftains asked for the support of the Norwegian king in their internal power struggles.

24 Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 2013a, p. 61.

Magnúsdóttir therefore claim that friendship was more important, from a political point of view, than kinship in the Icelandic commonwealth.

Relations between chieftains and farmers can thus be described as a classical patron-client system. Yet the sources often use terms of friendship to describe these relations. The vertical bonds meant that both magnates and farmers were involved in the constant feuds that left their mark on Icelandic society. The chieftains rarely had any permanent hirds, being instead dependent on the farmers to be able to mobilize military resources when armed conflict seemed imminent.²⁵ There was probably a similar patron-client system between magnates and farmers in the other Nordic countries, but they are seldom explicitly mentioned in the sources, which tend to speak of the farmers as a large, anonymous collective.²⁶

Jón Viðar Sigurðsson has shown that, when Iceland was incorporated in the kingdom of Norway in 1262/64, the power structure was radically transformed. Power was no longer built up from below, but exercised from above by a king “by the grace of God”. The chieftains were converted into a kind of *Dienstadel* whose elevated positions in the new administration rested on holding royal offices. The vertical bonds of loyalty to the king then became far more important than horizontal friendships between magnates or vertical bonds between chieftains and farmers. This in turn led to a fundamental change in relations of protection. The chieftains had previously been obliged to assist their friends and clients in conflicts. After the end of the Icelandic commonwealth, the culture of negotiation was replaced by royal law, where representatives of the service nobility were not infrequently forced to judge their former friends. Gifts, feasts, mediation, and compromises no longer had such a prominent place in political culture.²⁷

2.2 *The Debate about Political Development in Norway in the Civil War Era*

From about 1130 until the start of the thirteenth century, Norway was torn by civil wars, as pretenders to the throne allied with different groups of magnates in their struggle for power in the kingdom. Earlier research has painted

25 From the mid twelfth century onwards the chieftains began to maintain retinues of professional warriors. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1993, pp. 88 ff., 280. These were not regular hird organizations like those in Scandinavia.

26 This is the case, for example, with *Sverris saga*, *Gesta Danorum*, and to some extent *Heimskringla*. The sources are more concerned with confrontation than interaction between magnates and farmers. Sometimes, however, Snorri lets aristocrats such as Þorgnýr the lawman speak on behalf of the farmers (“the people”).

27 Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 2013a, p. 44; 55–57; 59–61.

a picture of a period of chaos and anarchy that affected all classes in society. According to Knut Helle, law codes such as the Law of Gulathing show that there had formerly been a balance between the farming community, the king, and the church. Through the organization of the *thing* the farmers could assert their rights and thereby exert considerable political influence at the local level.²⁸ As the feuds of the pretenders and the magnates escalated to “war of every man against every man”, however, the farmers lost this position. They therefore gave their support for strong royal power, which they saw as the only guarantee of judicial order and social protection. The state, represented by the church and the king, acting as a *rex iustus*, thus helped to develop society in a more civilized direction.²⁹

Sverre Bagge has applied a broader perspective, placing more emphasis on the active role of the aristocracy in the conflicts. A critical shortage of resources as a consequence of the end of the Viking Age plunder economy, in combination with the kings’ transfer of more and more land to the church, is said to have led to tougher competition for material assets. The magnates therefore become actively involved in the struggle for the throne by raising claimants to the throne. They thus formed “parties” or “factions” where the pretenders were entirely in the hands of magnate groups who used them as political symbols for their own purposes. Through fictive kinship ties such as fostering, the magnates created legitimacy and close relations to the royal families, thus making themselves into major forces impelling the struggles for the throne.³⁰ Like the Wars of the Roses in late medieval England, however, the civil wars led to a decimation of the aristocracy, which ultimately had the effect that competition for resources was no longer as intense. In the end the aristocracy therefore chose to back strong kings like Sverre (r. 1177–1202) and his grandson Håkon IV (1217–1263).

To explain the development of the conflicts, Bagge applies an anthropological perspective with great emphasis on the mechanisms of the feud society. The kings and the pretenders, like the magnates and the farmers, were drawn into conflicts as a consequence of their obligations to support the friends who

28 K. Helle, 2001, pp. 212.

29 K. Helle, 1974 (1st ed. 1965), p. 179.

30 Jón Viðar Sigurðsson maintains that the would-be kings were often children controlled by different factions of *lendir menn* (landed men holding land from the king), aiming to monopolize the resources of kingship. A common strategy to strengthen ties of loyalty between the landed men and the would-be king was that they assumed the responsibility of fostering the young kings. According to Sigurðsson this led to stronger cohesion within the group, while the polarization between the “parties” was exacerbated. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 2011, p. 99.

were the foundation for their positions of power. Vendettas and skirmishes at lower levels in society escalated quickly when friends sought the king's support to obtain revenge or redress. If the king refused to assist his friends, he risked losing not only his honour but also his social capital, as his friends could then choose to support his adversaries.³¹

Bagge also thinks that the escalation of the conflicts in the latter part of the twelfth century can be explained as a consequence of a development whereby more permanent factions arose, consisting of friends with a sense of internal solidarity and a willingness to avenge dead comrades. This meant that reconciliation with the opponent according to the rules of negotiation culture was no longer an alternative.³² The resource crisis and the mechanisms of the feud are thus more important factors in Bagge's explanatory model. When the civil war era ended after King Sverre's victory over his adversaries and his grandson Håkon IV's successful defence of the throne, Bagge's explanation is that this was largely a result of the establishment of a fixed line of succession.³³

Hans Jacob Orning has criticized the interpretation of twelfth-century Norway as a time of chaos and anarchy. He thinks that this explanation applies an evolutionistic view of the state based on the idea that only a strong king with the ability to exercise judicial authority over his subjects can create a well-functioning modern society.³⁴ Orning claims, in line with international research in legal anthropology, that the pre-state society was characterized by a culture of negotiation hedged by well-functioning rules for the management of conflicts. Like Patrick Geary in his studies of eleventh – and twelfth-century France, he believes that in pre-state Norway feuds and conflicts were a normal state of affairs which had a "socially constructive role in that they both tested and confirmed group relations".³⁵

According to this view, it was not the weakness of royal power, the lack of a fixed succession, or a crisis of resources for the aristocracy that caused the intensification of civil strife in Norway in the mid twelfth century. Instead it was the strong princely power represented by the jarl Erling Skakke that led the

31 S. Bagge, 2015, p. 4.

32 S. Bagge, 2015, p. 11.

33 S. Bagge, 2015, p. 10.

34 H.J. Orning, 2010a, pp. 1–16; H.J. Orning, 2013, pp. 45–82; H.J. Orning, 2015, pp. 285–292. Orning thinks that historians like Knut Helle have painted a picture of chaos based on sources such as the monk Theodoricus Monachus and the prince's mirror *Konungs skuggsía*, that is to say, sources exemplifying the new Christian ideology of lordship. According to Orning, it was in the interest of these authors to convey a picture in which the only alternative to strong kingship was a society of anarchy and violence.

35 H.J. Orning, 2010a, p. 5.

society into “imbalance”. In alliance with the archbishop, the jarl represented kingship by the grace of God, resting on an ideology in which the enemy was perceived as a criminal breach of a divinely sanctioned order, which had been confirmed by the coronation of the jarl’s son, Magnus Erlingsson, in 1164.

Peace negotiations and compromises with the opponents were no longer an option. Erling Skakke therefore adopted an intransigent attitude to his rivals, his strategy being to exterminate them one by one.³⁶ The powerful king was thus the leading proponent of violence. The imbalance and the polarization into two parties pervaded every level of society when the former regulation of horizontal and vertical relations based on reciprocity was no longer possible. The culture of negotiation, relying on mediation, reconciliation, and bonds of friendship, was replaced by unconditional subordination. Orning believes, in contrast to earlier research, that both magnates and farmers ought to have preferred weak kingship with its balance of power between rival groups rather than a self-willed prince demanding the submission of everyone. Nor does he attach importance solely to internal factors as Knut Helle or Sverre Bagge do. Erling Skakke’s alliance with the Danish king Valdemar I contributed to a strengthening of the jarl’s power position because the opponents were prevented from mobilizing military resources in neighbouring Denmark.³⁷

Sverre Bagge and Hans Jacob Orning agree, however, that the breakthrough of the ideology of kingship by the grace of God led to a more implacable attitude to the enemy. The culture of negotiation, based on compromises and renegotiation of friendships, was gradually replaced after 1157 by bitter conflict between two factions, as a result of which the only path to peace was the total submission of the opponent. In the following we shall look more closely at how bonds of friendship and the political structure were affected by this development.

2.3 *Protective Relationships and Military Development*

The twelfth-century Scandinavian kingdoms had a far more differentiated social and political hierarchy than Iceland.³⁸ The kings had various officers such as royal bailiffs, and these in turn had people under them.³⁹ In addition to this,

36 H.J. Orning, 2014, p. 211.

37 H.J. Orning, 2014, pp. 213.

38 On vertical relationships in medieval Scandinavia, see L. Hermanson & H.J. Orning, to be published in 2019.

39 Royal bailiffs (*exactores/provisores*) are mentioned in Ailnoth’s chronicle (c. 1111/12) of Knud the Holy. Their harsh treatment of the farmers leads to social unrest which results in a revolt against the king. This uprising, however, seems to be led by magnates. VSD: S. *Canutus rex*, Chapter 15, p. 102, Chapter 19, p. 106, Chapter 21, p. 107. Officials were often

the military structure was different in that the kings and most powerful magnates had sufficient economic resources to be able to maintain permanent armed retinues.⁴⁰ In the civil war era in Norway, for example, armed gangs developed through time, supporting themselves mainly by ravaging among the enemy's farmers.

Sverris saga (c. 1220) and *Heimskringla* (c. 1230) rarely mention the farmers as individual actors; instead they are large groups who are usually more or less forced to give their support to one of the fighting parties. The sources are primarily interested in relations between members of the elite. Snorri Sturluson writes about the conflict between Erling Skakke and Jarl Sigurd that: "Each side struck many blows on the other in persecutions or in killing of people and that is not recorded in writing when leading men were not involved".⁴¹ The author of *Sverris saga* does not consider vertical bonds of friendship between individual magnates and farmers. The farmers are described in disparaging terms, mostly portrayed as victims seeking at all costs to stay outside the fighting for the throne.⁴²

The farming population appears to have endeavoured to perform a balancing act between the conflicting factions and to give their support to whichever side seemed to be the winning team.⁴³ In one passage the anonymous author of *Sverris saga* writes that the farmers only gave information about the enemy to the side with the biggest army.⁴⁴ Just before a battle between Sverre the pretender and King Magnus Erlingsson, Sverre claims that Magnus had forced the farmers to fight for him, and so they would not care who was victorious as long as they themselves were not wounded.⁴⁵ On some occasions there are also descriptions of how the farmers combined to raise forces against the king's men. These attempts at resistance, however, were brutally crushed, resulting in fines and payment of tribute.⁴⁶ In the Danish source material, such as Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, we are likewise given no information about patron-client

appointed in newly conquered areas. One example is Norway's *sýslumenn*. S. Bagge, 1999, p. 316.

40 In Iceland there was little political and economic distance between farmers and chieftains until the start of the thirteenth century. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1993, p. 76.

41 *Heimskringla*, xvi.11.

42 *Sverris saga*, 16.21, 49.62–63, 82.102–104. This negative attitude is expressed, for instance, in the description of the farmers as cowardly and incompetent fighters, unable to live up to the ideal of the hirdmen.

43 On the relation of Norwegian pretenders to the farmers see H.J. Orning, 2008, pp. 257–310.

44 *Sverris saga*, 58.74.

45 *Sverris saga*, 47.59.

46 *Sverris saga*, 21.48–51, 78.99, 79.100, 116.143–144, 163.209–211. It is difficult to determine, however, what exactly the author means by the term "farmer". The most significant difference

relations between magnates and farmers. The learned aristocrat Saxo has an even more negative attitude to the peasants (*rustici*), who are almost always described as a primitive anonymous mob.⁴⁷

A contributory reason for the differences in socio-political structure between Iceland and Norway was that the protracted dynastic struggles in Norway resulted in a process of military professionalization that affected social relations. Through time the conflicts had a devastating effect on all strata in society, which probably led to a loosening of the traditional relations of protection such as patron-client liaisons between farmers and magnates.⁴⁸ In Norway gangs and *hirds* developed, with a growing element of service relations. These fighting bands had warfare as their main source of livelihood and thus supported themselves mostly by pillage, which was a serious threat to the farmers.⁴⁹ The entire culture of honour associated with relations of personal protection between farmers and magnates must therefore have changed in pace with professionalization.

King Sverre's *Birkebeiner* contributed heavily to this development. They were feared by the farmers, and this was probably why the king found it difficult to gain the farmers' support after his victory over Magnus Erlingsson. *Sverris saga* tells of how the Birkebeiner chieftain Svina-Peter talks to the people of Bergen just before Sverre's forces arrive in the town. He claims the time is

between an army of farmers and a royal army (besides the material equipment) was that the farmers had no hirdmen. In Norway cavalry was used to a very limited extent.

47 See, for example, how Saxo describes the farmers' uprising in Skåne, Saxo, 15.4 ff., 16.1 ff. On some occasions, however, the farmers represent the Danish people and are then the moral guardians of the kingdom. Saxo thus, like John of Salisbury, makes a clear distinction between the king and the realm. As for the Norse evidence, similar tendencies can be discerned in Snorri. In the famous episode about Þorgnýr, the lawman, together with the farmers, represents wisdom and the right of the people. *Heimskringla*, v.11.80. *Baglersaga* has a far more positive attitude to the farmers than *Sverris saga*. This also applies to some extent to *Hákonar saga*. S. Bagge, 1996, pp. 132 f., 148 f., 154 f.

48 These traditional relations of protection can be compared with the Germanic legal concept of *munt*, the rights and obligations associated with the lord's protection. See e.g. O. Brunner, 1939; H. Kaminsky & J. Van Horn Melton, 1992, pp. xxviii, xxxv. In the twelfth century a sharper distinction was made between kingly and chieftainly power. Designations such as *dróttinn* and *herra* occur frequently in Norwegian and Icelandic sources from the High Middle Ages. They were primarily used about kings. These had greater power over their subjects in that, unlike the chieftains, they could pronounce death sentences. The legal right to use force increasingly became a royal prerogative. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1993, pp. 267 f.

49 The social origin of the hird members is a matter of debate. They were probably recruited from a broad social spectrum consisting of everything from magnates who had been deprived of their estates to free men of humble origin.

now past when the arrival of the Birkebeiner was synonymous with robbery and slaughter: "And with our King will come meek and gentle Guardsmen, who shall be latch and lock to secure the freedom and peace of this market-town and others".⁵⁰ The saga also has examples of how the farmers turn to the gangs for protection instead of to individual magnates.⁵¹ Through time these bands often became of crucial significance for the outcome of the conflicts. On the eve of the Battle of Ilevollene (1180) outside Trondheim, Sverre paints a scornful picture of Magnus Erlingsson's army as consisting of men who "are more at home at a wedding than a fight, and are more accustomed to mead-drinking than to warfare". He goes on to declare that they expect the toughest opposition from King Magnus's hirdmen. His liegemen, however, will be more cautious, whereas the farmers do not care who falls.⁵²

During the reign of King Sverre it is consequently possible to discern a development whereby the hirds became increasingly important for the king's exercise of power. Sverre Bagge writes that a new elite of warriors was established, dependent on the king for their positions, which meant that relations between the king and the magnates were more to do with service than friendship.⁵³ There is a great deal to suggest that the military development was an important factor affecting the change in socio-political conditions in the Nordic countries. It was a contributory factor in the transition that started at the end of the twelfth century, from a traditional political organization, largely resting on bonds of friendship, to a more institutionalized political structure with relations of service.

Hans Jacob Orning, who has studied in detail the fundamental premises for the exercise of power by Norwegian kings in the High Middle Ages, has drawn the conclusion that they could break free from the reciprocal obligations of friendship by attaching men to the hird. The hird was built up around a relation of service between the commander and his soldiers, which – through its unilateral character and its greater asymmetry – entailed a subordination that was clearly different from vertical bonds of friendship.⁵⁴ Because the kings commanded hirds with loyal warriors, they were no longer as dependent on the military resources of the farmers, which meant that they could demand

50 *Sverris saga*, 96.121. On several occasions Sverre himself orders his men to be "peaceable" towards townspeople, farmers, and merchants. In his speech against drunkenness the king declares that "Warriors in time of peace should be gentle as lambs, but in war dauntless as lions", *Sverris saga*, 104.130.

51 *Sverris saga*, 148.185.

52 *Sverris saga*, 47.59.

53 S. Bagge, 1999, p. 317.

54 H.J. Orning, 2008, pp. 125–153.

the farmers' obedience and thus did not need to show any concern for bilateral obligations of friendship.⁵⁵

A noticeable difference between Norway and Iceland was that there was never any full-scale warfare in Iceland. It is only in the late Sturlung period that we can talk of outright civil war where conflicts were settled by pitched battle.⁵⁶ Instead the political rivalry was like the feud with its limited use of violence, a kind of low-intensity warfare in which the parties mounted pinpointed actions to gain an advantage. In conflicts between the chieftains they could choose to attack the enemy directly, for instance by a night raid on the rival's farm or by undermining the basis for the adversary's power, that is his personal power base, his allied friends and kinsmen.⁵⁷ This could be done solely through threats of violence or through pillaging with the intention of deterring the friends from supporting their lord or ally. Another tactic was quite simply to kill the friends one by one in order to weaken or completely destroy the opponent's network.⁵⁸

At the end of the twelfth century the chieftains in Iceland began to rely more on "trusted men" and "followers" (see Chapter 3, page 120). These were tied to their lords through vertical bonds, confirmed with oaths of loyalty. Through time they played an ever greater role in the exercise of power because the sworn followers were an important element in government and the apparatus of force. According to Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, the Norwegian system of trusted men and followers served as a model for chieftains in twelfth – and thirteenth-century Iceland.⁵⁹ The increased use of sworn servants must have meant that local friendships and patron-client ties were weakened as the more regionally based servant organizations grew. These were also based on patron-client relations but they were bonds of loyalty to a few lords, and the clients were not primarily seeking protection but reward. The followers were often used in Icelandic feuds as executioners and assassins.⁶⁰ It was these men who had to do

55 H.J. Orning, 2008, p. 285. Orning claims that the normative sources portray the king's relationship to the farmers as being one that expected their obedience. The kings' sagas, however, show that the farmers' obedience was dependent on strong mutual and personal elements. H.J. Orning, 2008, pp. 257–310. On the development of relations of protection in twelfth-century Norway, see H.J. Orning, 2013, pp. 45–82.

56 See e.g. the Battle of Örygsstaðir, *Sturlunga saga*, Chapters 138–139, pp. 335–344.

57 In the Icelandic sagas there are also several examples of conflicts that start among the clients, who then seek the support of their patrons. If the chieftains heed their appeal for help, they too are drawn into the escalating feud.

58 Today these strategies survive in mafia culture. See e.g. T. Lappalainen, 1993, pp. 37 f.; J. Dickie, 2004, p. 10. There are also similarities to classical guerrilla warfare.

59 Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1987, p. 165.

60 Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1987, p. 167.

the dirty work, and like the “soldiers” of the Sicilian mafia they could enhance their status through their bloody actions and rise in their leaders’ esteem.⁶¹

2.4 *Undermining Lordship – The Struggle for the Throne in Norway*

The sources describing the civil war in twelfth-century Norway and Denmark give hints that this kind of low-intensity warfare, aimed at the enemy’s personal power base, was also waged in these countries, parallel to efforts to gain the upper hand through large-scale battles.⁶² There was always a link between the magnates’ internal feuds and their participation in the struggles of the pretenders to the throne. In *Sverris saga* it is rare for King Sverre to give his men direct orders to engage in combat for his cause.⁶³ Instead he has to appeal to the warriors’ self-interest to motivate them to fight for him. One of the most common arguments used by the king was to cite the injustices they had suffered as a result of internal feuds with the magnates on the opposing side.⁶⁴ Sverre was thus forced to perform a balancing act between the norms of the feud society and the ideals of Christian kingship.

At the same time, the kings themselves were under constant threat from the low-intensity warfare of the rival claimants to the throne, seeking to undermine the basis of their kingship, that is to say, the magnates who were linked to them through bonds of friendship. This tactic was geared to systematically eliminating the adversary’s friends one by one. The aim was not just to weaken the enemy but also to force him to engage in battle even though he did not have the necessary resources. A king who was exposed to this warfare had to take revenge on the enemy as quickly as possible to avoid losing his honour and thereby his friends. A loss of symbolic capital in the form of honour thus had the result that he also lost his social capital, that is, his friends. It was thus a “catch 22” situation for the kings. Either they went into battle with inferior

61 A. Blok, 1988 (1st ed. 1974), pp. 173 ff. The followers were not infrequently from families of humble origin. A similar system was probably used in twelfth-century Denmark. Saxo, for instance, condemns Svend Grathe’s use of officials of low birth since they were a threat to the position of the high aristocracy and the entire culture surrounding idealized reciprocal bonds of friendship.

62 Robert of Ely, in his hagiography of Knud Lavard, hints that the Danish prince Magnus Nielsen was involved in a personal feud with Knud Lavard’s friend, Erik of Falster. The author writes that Magnus planned to burn down Erik’s farm. vSD: *Roberti Elgensis*, p. 238. See also L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 99, 140.

63 S. Bagge, 1996, pp. 24, 29; H.J. Orning, 2008, pp. 126–136. Sverre himself justified his struggle in terms of personal blood vengeance and inheritance demands. *Sverris saga*, 60.79, 99.124–125.

64 Another method was to tempt them with big rewards if they triumphed in the forthcoming battle. S. Bagge, 1996, pp. 24 ff.

forces, which entailed the risk of a crushing defeat, or they chose to bide their time, which meant that they risked being abandoned by their men and being accused of cowardice.

The phenomenon is mentioned by Snorri in *Heimskringla*. In the story of the conflict between the joint kings and half-brothers Sigurd Munn and Inge the Hunchback (c. 1150–1155) the author gives us a glimpse of how this tactic worked. The relationship between the sickly king Inge and his closest ally, the landed man Gregorius Dagsson, is described as an intimate friendship. Gregorius acted as the prince's wise counsellor, guiding the cautious king on how best to take action against his opponents.⁶⁵ He was always loyal to his lord, but he also demanded something in return for his friendship and fidelity. On one occasion Gregorius wants to attack King Sigurd and his men in revenge for the murder of one of his housecarls, but Inge advises against this. When King Inge's mother Ingrid then discovers that one of her son's hirdmen has also been murdered by Sigurd's men, she goes to the king to get him to act. Ingrid reproves her son, declaring that "he would always be an insignificant king if he was unwilling to do anything even when his followers were slaughtered one after another just like pigs".⁶⁶ The king is said to have been enraged by her criticism. Gregorius then enters, wearing a coat of mail and a helmet. He defends Ingrid for speaking the truth and then offers his support for an attack on Sigurd. The circle around the king, however, thinks the time is not right. Gregorius then exclaims:

They are plucking your men off, killing my manservant a little while ago, and now your follower, and they will be wanting to hunt down me or some other landed man that they think will be the greatest loss to you, since they can see that you are doing nothing about it, and will deprive you of the kingdom after your friends have been killed. Now whichever way your other landed men want to go, I am not willing to wait to be slaughtered like an ox, and Sigurðr and I shall conclude our business tonight in whatever way may turn out to be possible. But it is both that you are in a bad way on account of your poor health, and moreover I think you have little desire to keep your friends. But I am now quite ready to go from here to face Sigurðr, for my standard is here outside.⁶⁷

65 In the saga Gregorius represents the ideal of an aristocratic chieftain: courageous, resolute, and wise. Such chieftains spoke plainly and were candid with the king. Snorri often stresses Gregorius's magnificent appearance and mentions that he was called "that gilt helmet". *Heimskringla*, XIV.27. This ideal of a chieftain is very similar to the picture Saxo paints of representatives of the Skjalm clan such as Bishop Absalon, Esbern Snare, and Sune Ebbesen.

66 *Heimskringla*, XIV.27.

67 *Heimskringla*, XIV.27.

The king finally took action, admitting that he had delayed too long, and that it was now time to settle the matter. Sigurd Munn was attacked and killed. Yet Inge still had a serious enemy in the form of his other rival and half-brother, King Eystein Haraldsson. A low-intensity war was then fought between Inge and Eystein, and Snorri writes that they both had each other's friends murdered. Gregorius is said to have had his farm burnt down and his livestock slaughtered by Eystein's men. King Inge and Gregorius nevertheless managed to extricate themselves from the destructive deadlock by adopting a different tactic which involved winning over the majority of Eystein's friends among the landed men.

Through time this greatly weakened Eystein's army, which meant that his men ended up refusing to follow him. One of his landed men, named Hallkell Huk, then said to the king: "Let your chests of gold stand by you now and defend your land".⁶⁸ Finally all of Eystein's men fled from him as Inge's army approached. The king tried to hide but was found by a man named Simun Skalp who had formerly been his landed man and friend. Eystein pleaded with Simun to help him escape, saying that this would be seemly: "Because for a long time things have been well between us, though now it is different".⁶⁹ Simun said that this was out of the question now. The king accepted his fate and asked to hear the mass. He then lay down on the ground and asked Simun's men to strike him in the cross between his shoulders. Simun ordered the man who had been chosen to kill Eystein to hurry up and deal the blow, since the king "had been crouching there over the heather for too long". The axe fell and Snorri writes that he was considered to have died manfully.⁷⁰

Both *Heimskringla* and *Sverris saga* thus testify that these expeditions to wipe out the enemy's friends could be an effective way to destroy the opponent's dominion. A victory on the battlefield was almost always followed by mopping-up actions against the defeated adversary's friends, who were slaughtered one after the other. This often took place after torture had forced them to reveal where they had hidden their wealth. This dirty work was probably a "necessary" follow-up after every decisive victory.⁷¹ Snorri tells how, after the throne claimant Harald Gille had defeated Magnus the Blind in 1135, great

68 *Heimskringla*, XIV.31.

69 *Heimskringla*, XIV.32.

70 *Heimskringla*, XIV.32. Snorri goes on to tell how miracles happened where Eystein had been killed and at his grave, until his enemies poured soup made from dog meat over the grave.

71 Clear-up actions also ensued after smaller coup-like events such as murders, ambushes, and attacks. Galbert of Bruges, for example, describes in detail how the men who staged the coup after the murder of Charles of Flanders hunted down the count's friends. See Chapter 3.

efforts were expended to find those who had been Magnus's best friends and who might know most about his treasures and valuables.⁷² This is mentioned immediately after the description of how Magnus was tortured and mutilated as Harald Gille's thralls put his eyes out, cut off one of his legs, and then castrated him.⁷³ As this was done they probably tried to extract information from the king about his friends.

Sigurd Slembe, another pretender to the throne, met a similar fate. The account of the torture the magnates inflicted on him before he died is one of the most gruesome in *Heimskringla*.⁷⁴ They broke his leg bones and arm bones, then they wanted to flay him alive, but they had to give up this idea because Sigurd was bleeding so profusely, and the men instead flogged him until "all his skin was completely off as if it had been flayed".⁷⁵ Then they broke his backbone with a log. Finally the men hanged Sigurd in a tree, chopped off his head, and buried the body in a heap of stones.⁷⁶ Snorri explains the cruel torture as a consequence of private desire for revenge among some magnates.⁷⁷

⁷² *Heimskringla*, XIII.8.

⁷³ These acts of violence can be interpreted as ritually conditioned. Anton Blok writes that: "Violence is interwoven with masculinity, and the human body often serves as a cultural medium, as a source of metaphorical material to symbolize power relations". A. Blok, 2001, p. 113. In Ireland, where Harald Gille had grown up and where clan conflict was rife, castration was a relatively widespread form of mutilation. Similar descriptions of torture are reported in *Sturlunga saga*. See e.g. the genital mutilation of Snorri Sturluson's son, Órækja, by Sturla Sighvatsson, *Sturlunga saga*, Chapter 115, p. 299. A chieftain who had been desecrated by castration had lost his honour and thus had difficulty retaining his allies. His attractiveness on the marriage and concubinage market must also have been seriously reduced.

⁷⁴ *Heimskringla*, XIV.12. Snorri builds his detailed account on the older source *Hryggjarstykki* written by Eiríkr Oddsson c. 1150–1170.

⁷⁵ *Heimskringla*, XIV.12.

⁷⁶ These kinds of deviate ritualized burials were practised for traitors and evildoers (*niðingr*) in order to demonstrate their eternal exclusion from society. A.I. Riisøy, 2015, p. 73.

⁷⁷ Snorri is at pains to emphasize whether a claimant to the throne died with honour or not. Violation and torture was probably part of a symbolic discourse of violence which not only desecrated the victim's honour but was also intended as an insult to his supporters. Similar strategies can be found among the mafia of Naples and Sicily. See e.g. A. Blok, 2001, pp. 108 f.; R. Saviano, 2017 (first publ. 2006), pp. 130. Anton Blok says that different forms of excessive violence are rarely irrational or "senseless". Instead these acts have a ritual and communicative meaning. Desecrating a corpse, for example, can be interpreted as a strategy for the public humiliation of an enemy's honour; "violence often has the character of theatre and performance in which things are 'said' as much as they are 'done'". A. Blok, 2001, p. 111.

The bloody pursuit of the pretenders' friends appears to have escalated during the dynastic conflicts.⁷⁸ The actions hit directly against the private power base, which meant that several landed men and big farmers could not defend the homes and properties that were the foundation for their positions. This in turn may have contributed to the rise in war bands and the increasing significance of the hirds. Many magnates thus found themselves in the absurd situation that the safest place for them was in the hird. Their private foundation of material resources had shrunk and their social capital in the form of clients could only be maintained with difficulty, while horizontal bonds of friendship had simultaneously become deadly dangerous. This meant that the magnates gradually changed from having been the king's friends to become his officers. Becoming the king's hirdman may also have been the only possible way to regain the lost prosperity through the prospect of being granted royal fiefs (*veizlur*) in the event of victory on the battlefield.

The battles for the throne thus led to a weakening of the traditional relations of protection based on friendship. This would ultimately prove to strengthen the hierarchical exercise of power by the king.⁷⁹ Obligations of friendship had meant that the king easily risked becoming a tool in the magnates' hands. When these liaisons were weakened, relationships were reversed. The creation of a stable central power in Norway was thus preceded, especially in the latter part of the twelfth century, by a chaotic period which at times resembled Hobbes's "war of every man against every man", where the road to stronger dominion for the king was lined by the blood of good friends.

2.5 *Friendship and the Political Structure*

As previously observed, there is consensus today among many medieval historians that the Nordic countries cannot be regarded as kin societies, where the kindred was a fundamental judicial body and thus the most important institution

78 According to Hans Jacob Orning, this development was intensified, especially in the reign of the jarl Erling Skakke and his son Magnus Erlingsson c. 1161–1179/84. Their alliance with the archbishop and also with the Danish king Valdemar I made them so powerful that they completely abandoned any kind of settlement with the enemy and instead engaged in outright purges. H.J. Orning, 2014, pp. 211–212.

79 *Konungs skuggsiá*, composed in the mid thirteenth century, paints a picture where the farmers are not primarily subordinate to local patrons. Instead they are portrayed as a class subject to the king and the local officials representing the central government. S. Bagge, 2000, p. 40. In the introduction to the Law of Gulathing from the early twelfth century the farmers call the king "our friend". In the national law of Magnus the Law-amender from 1274 the farmers are no longer called the king's friends but now the king's *þegnar* – subjects. H.J. Orning, 2011, p. 145.

in society. Scholars now emphasize the significance of friendship for the creation of political factions.⁸⁰ Because of their flexibility these bonds were easier to adapt to the unstable political structure, which was characterized by constantly changing constellations (see Chapter 3).⁸¹ Great effort was expended in establishing pacts of friendship, but the winners in power struggles were often those who quickly changed their alliances at the right moment.⁸² In this game it was important to possess the ability to sense and predict the consequences of an alteration in the power balance.

The fundamental units in the traditional political organization were retinues and coalitions. A retinue was based chiefly on vertical relations between the members and their leader. The ties could be hierarchical bonds of friendship, as in the case of the bands of farmers assembled by Icelandic chieftains, or relations of service, such as those prevailing in the hirds of Scandinavian kings, bishops, and magnates. Coalitions were primarily based on horizontal friendships, established in order to attain a specific goal, for example, to deprive a certain chieftain of his power position.⁸³ These ad hoc alignments included several groups of leaders who had private retinues at their disposal. The coalitions were temporary and often came to an end once they had achieved their purpose, or having failed to do so.⁸⁴ The retinues were more stable, but the leaders in the twelfth century could not expect unconditional loyalty from the members. Several examples in the Norwegian-Icelandic and the Danish source material show that political leaders could be abandoned by their men after a short time. Kings did not yet have sufficient resources to demand the absolute loyalty of their subjects.

80 For Iceland see e.g. J.L. Byock, 1988; Auður Magnúsdóttir, 2001; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 2007. For Norway see e.g. S. Bagge, 1999; H.J. Orning, 2008. For Denmark, L. Hermanson, 2000. The significance of kinship ties tends instead to increase with the institutionalization of society, see M.H. Gelting, 1999b, 2000, and works cited there.

81 The three co-kings and half-brothers Inge the Hunchback, Sigurd Munn, and Eystein Haraldsson actually represented three different factions of friends among the magnates which formed a temporary coalition to counter the threat from Magnus the Blind and Sigurd Slembe. The magnates forged these pacts when the kings were not of age. When the threat had been overcome, conflicts arose between the co-kings, with the brothers and their respective friend groups fighting against each other. That the factions around the kings consisted of groups of friends is illustrated by King Inge's letter to Sigurd, where the writer uses terms such as "friends and good men".

82 L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 226–232.

83 See the concept of "action sets" in J. Boissevain, 1974, p. 35. On retinues and coalitions, see F.G. Bailey, 1969. On "kin-based action groups", see H.J. Tanner, 2004, p. 9.

84 In Norway the coalitions tended to become more permanent from the 1160s onwards. S. Bagge, 1999, pp. 313 f. A similar development can be discerned in Sweden in the thirteenth century.

This unpredictable political organization was very difficult for a king to control, as King Eystein found to his cost. A man who was your friend one day could have become your enemy the next day. This meant that the kings and chieftains could never be sure how strong their real power base was. When leaders were preparing to engage in combat, they usually had to assure themselves of the support and loyalty of their men. When battle came closer, the lack of large permanent armies meant that kings and magnates were forced to spend a great deal of time recruiting men, with the attendant promises and oaths. The sources tell us time and again of how the rival leaders were intensively engaged in an arms race that required mobilizing as many friends as possible.

For the kings and chieftain it therefore became extremely important to acquire a central position in the flow of information, gifts, and favours.⁸⁵ They had to make themselves attractive and indispensable by various means, to muster as much personal support as possible. The leaders were very keen to link the information, gifts, and favours to their own person so as to prevent their men from acquiring this on their own. The most effective way to create a personal relationship of this kind was to establish and uphold more or less intimate bonds of friendship. To this end, the powerful men could hold lavish feasts where they generously showered their men with gifts to ensure their loyalty.⁸⁶ This policy, however, required huge resources and functioned only as long as the leaders could acquire new material resources. They were consequently more or less forced to pursue an aggressive policy.

As we shall see later on, twelfth-century kings strove by different methods to make themselves independent of this expensive kind of friendship exchange. The thirteenth century saw the establishment of a royal administrative hierarchy based on offices and relations of service, which meant that the monarchs

85 A ruler who controls external material resources can give exclusive gifts to his allies, gifts that they can never repay, and thus they are in a constant debt of gratitude to the giver. There is therefore a clear link between control over trade, the acquisition of symbolic and social capital, and the wielding of power through vertical bonds of friendship. During the twelfth century a prince like the Danish duke Knud Lavard could emerge as protector of the town of Schleswig. The duke is said to have had many friends, not only among the country's aristocracy but also among the burghers of Schleswig. The reigning king Niels was simultaneously keen to be seen as the protector of Lund. See also the kings' interest in the guilds, p. 211. On economic systems in Nordic medieval society see K. Lunden, 1972. Parallels could be drawn between Knud Lavard's relationship to the burghers in Schleswig and his cousin Charles's the Good relationship to the burghers of Bruges.

86 The gifts could be of the most diverse kinds. Gifts in the form of land transfers, however, had a specific meaning because receiving land was often synonymous with lifelong submission. On gifts and feasts, see W. Jezierski *et al.*, 2015, pp. 139–357.

grounded their positions on a more stable power foundation. In Denmark, Norway, and Sweden normative sources such as the *Lex Castrensis* (*Vederloven*), the *Hirðskrá*, and the *Skänninge Statute* testify to the kings' efforts to enhance the status of royal service. The Danish *Lex Castrensis* (written down in the 1180s) shows that the king had great problems gaining control over the magnates' retinues and the coalitions that were set up as a consequence of the magnates' constant feuds.

The man who wrote down the law, Svend Aggesen, traces the historical roots of the problem to the days of Canute the Great, but the text is probably intended to serve as a model for contemporary intractable magnates. The author declares that King Canute's warriors should set aside their internal squabbles and instead "serve together with equal devotion, as befits honest messmates" (*contectales*). They should therefore be prepared to obey the king's orders "like limbs subject to one head".⁸⁷ Aggesen continues by observing that it is not easy to pacify such a large group of "quarrelsome men". The difficulty in maintaining order between the warriors resulted in the institution of the strict laws of the retainers.

In Sweden the *Skänninge Statute*, issued by King Magnus Ladulås (r. 1275–1290) in 1284, shows that the traditional political organization, characterized by retinues and coalitions, was a highly tenacious structure, which appears to have persisted well into the High Middle Ages. One purpose of the statute was to prevent the magnates from overpowering the king by meeting him with excessively large retinues. It also established rules to avoid deadly feuds (*døperlik owinscap*) from starting between the magnates and the members of different hirds, which were a threat not only to general security and order but also to the king's position.⁸⁸ Magnus Ladulås also instituted a ban on secret alliances (*lønlek samband*) between high-born men. This meant that the lords were prohibited from entering into clandestine coalitions, which were a serious threat to the king's uncertain position.⁸⁹

The Swedish historian K.G. Westman claims that both the *Skänninge Statute* and the somewhat older *Alsnö Statute* indicate that the magnates were outside the group that the king designated as "his men", that is to say, those who were bound to him in a service relationship. He cites the parallel of the Danish king Erik Klipping's ordinance from 1276, which emphasizes that the lords

87 Svend Aggesen, *Lex Castrensis*, 3:33–34. *Contectales* originally referred to married couples. J.F. Niemeyer, 1976, p. 262.

88 On the perception of friendship as a threat to the general rule of law in fourteenth-century Sweden, see E. Österberg, 2007, pp. 170 ff.

89 DS/1: 813.

should be in a subordinate relationship of service to their prince.⁹⁰ The Swedish statutes, however, mention only the prohibition on the magnates' secret coalitions.⁹¹ This indicates that the relationship between Swedish magnates and the king at the end of the thirteenth century was still to a large extent dependent on personal bonds.⁹²

Retinues and coalitions were often created as a consequence of free, rational choices on the part of all those involved. Bonds of friendship, however, could be established from above as a domineering technique. The fact that the Nordic societies in the twelfth century had a conflict structure with no beginning or end meant that the power constellations were in constant movement. Hans Jacob Orning has drawn the conclusion for Norway that the loyalty of the magnates and the farmers to the king was contextual and therefore had to be actively invoked all the time when the prince confronted his subordinates. These meetings had a ritualized form following a fixed pattern. Their submission was often renegotiated in that it was presented as if the subordinates had been "honoured" with the king's friendship. From the king's side this was regarded as a benevolent favour, while the subjects in many cases underwent this ritual chiefly to avoid incurring his enmity. The fact that the king called them his friends, however, meant that it was an honourable subordination, meaning that they retained their status as free men.

Since these vertical bonds of friendship were perceived by the magnates and farmers as situationally determined, their loyalty/friendship was dependent on the king's presence.⁹³ If power relations changed, for example, if his power had been undermined by a stronger rival, there was no reason to stick to previously contracted friendships. The fact that vertical bonds of friendship were connected to specific situations also meant that there was no contradiction in a person forming friendships with different lords.

2.6 *The Fruits of Vertical Friendship*

The ancient Greek and Roman societies were permeated by patron-client relations. In the sources patronage is described as a *liaison* based on

90 At the start of the fourteenth century the Norwegian king Håkon Magnusson tried to reduce the power base of the high aristocracy through various restrictions. O. Moseng *et al.*, 1999, pp. 187 f.; S. Imsen, 2002, pp. 65 f.

91 K.G. Westman, 1904, p. 84.

92 Perhaps this is one explanation for the strong position of the Swedish aristocracy in the High and Late Middle Ages. Herman Schück has described Sweden during this period as an "aristocratic republic". H. Schück, 1984, pp. 65–72.

93 H.J. Orning, 2008.

philia/amicitia.⁹⁴ In the Roman Republic the same terms were thus used to designate political alliances between equals in status, for vertical client relations, and for emotional bonds of friendship.⁹⁵ The majority of Roman authors sought the “friendship” of various patrons to obtain protection and financial support. When a bond of this kind had been established, both patron and protégé regarded each other as *amici*.⁹⁶ This was a reciprocal relationship, since both parties had something to gain from it. The degree of reciprocity was uneven, however, as it was usually the client who was in greatest need of the patron’s support.⁹⁷

The protection of a powerful patron gave the client many advantages. Roman authors were nevertheless well aware of the risks of this type of friendship. The debt of gratitude to the superior created a dependence that could entail heavy obligations and restrictions on personal freedom. Horace (65–8 BC), who was an Epicurean and thus represented an individualistic morality, warned of the weighty responsibilities of vertical friendship when he wrote: “The cultivation of a powerful friend is sweet to those who haven’t tried it; a man who has is wary of it.”⁹⁸

In the medieval feud society the vertical relations of protection guaranteed not only the individual’s survival. They were also a precondition for social and political advancement. These bonds gave social status and identity because the client’s esteem in society was valued in terms of his contacts upwards in the hierarchy. This meant that medieval people were always actively seeking or renewing ties of friendship with persons of higher status. Brian McGuire has studied the significance that the Venerable Bede (c. 672–735) attached to the word *amicitia*. He observes that the term was often synonymous with *beneficium*, meaning that friendship was associated with obtaining specific benefits, rewards, gifts, and concrete material assistance.⁹⁹ The key to happiness and prosperity in life was thereby synonymous with honourable submission to a generous and well-meaning lord. McGuire refers to the Old English poem

94 According to Gabriel Herman, the Greeks did not use any hierarchical terms corresponding to the Romans’ *patronus-cliens* or the medieval *dominus-vassus*. He states that when Polybius tried to interpret for Greek readers what the Romans called *patroni* and *clientes*, he could not find any more suitable word than *philoi*. G. Herman, 1987, p. 38.

95 J. Hellegouarc’h, 1972, pp. 41–62.

96 P. White, 1978, pp. 78 ff.; B. Gold, 1987, pp. 5 ff.; D. Konstan, 1997, p. 3.

97 The patron could have any number of clients, whereas the protégés usually had just one or a few patrons.

98 Cf. D. Konstan, 1997, p. 141.

99 B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. 92.

The Wanderer, where a man without a lord is equated with a person without a friend.¹⁰⁰

An episode in *Sverris saga* shows that men without lords were not accepted as worthy adversaries in the twelfth-century Norwegian warrior culture. After King Sverre's enemy Magnus Erlingsson had died in 1184, a rebel band known as the Kuvlungur was created, led by a chieftain named Jon Kuvlung. He claimed to be the son of the former king, Inge the Hunchback. Several battles were fought between the Kuvlungur and the Birkebeiner. Jon Kuvlung was killed in a minor clash outside Bergen. The majority of his army, however, had not taken part in the fighting, having withdrawn to the mountains outside the town. After the fall of their chieftain, they came down to the town and challenged the Birkebeiner to fight. King Sverre, however, asked his men to have nothing to do with them, saying: "We must not fight [...] with headless men".¹⁰¹ It was probably regarded not merely as without honour to meet "headless" groups in combat; it was also against the rules of warfare which stipulated that a fighting unit must have a leader.¹⁰² Vertical bonds with a well-reputed lord were thus a symbolic capital, which in turn meant that one could not have any symbolic gain from vanquishing lordless men.

The Danish source material has several examples of major military enterprises which were cancelled because of the death of the man who was to lead them. Saxo, for example, tells how the Danish king Svend Grathe stopped his campaign against Jutland (1151) when news reached him of the death of his friend Ebbe Skjalmsen, the commander of the Sjølland forces.¹⁰³ Similar cases occurred in the thirteenth century. After the murder of the Danish king Erik Klipping in 1286, fighting broke out between his successor King Erik Menved (r. 1287–1319) and a group of Danish magnates who are often known as "the outlaws". These formed a coalition with the Norwegian royal family, the Danish archbishop, and Valdemar, duke of Southern Jutland. In 1293 they planned

100 B.P. McGuire, 1988, p. 93.

101 *Sverris saga*, 109.137. The English translation has "leaderless", but "headless" would be a more adequate translation.

102 King Sverre's expression "headless men" can also be coloured by the organic political ideology in which the realm or the state is likened to a body with the king as its head (see p. 195). This is represented, for example, by John of Salisbury (*corpus rei publicae*) in *Policraticus*, Book IV, Chapter 8, p. 50; Book V, Chapter 2, pp. 66 ff. In *Sverris saga* King Sverre dreams that he is ordered by a "dream man" to eat the body of a roasted man. At first Sverre eats very reluctantly, but his appetite grows steadily, until he wants to devour the head. The dream man then asks him to wait. When Sverre wakes up, he interprets the body as his defeated enemy the jarl Erling, while the head was the still undefeated king, Magnus Erlingsson. *Sverris saga*, 42.53–54.

103 Saxo, 14.4.3.

a large campaign against Denmark. The offensive came to nothing, however, because the leader of the outlaws, the estate owner and marshal Stig Andersen Hvide, died.¹⁰⁴

The examples show that the political groupings and major organizations of the time were dependent on certain key persons. If one such individual died it could mean that a large fighting faction was suddenly dissolved, which was a consequence of the fact that military forces were mobilized via social networks. The German scholar Gerd Althoff has examined vertical bonds between the German commanders and their men. He notes that vassals in the twelfth century had hierarchical ties of friendship with their lord, but that they less often had personal ties to each other.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps this can also be one explanation why the Nordic sources say that major military enterprises, which must have taken a long time to organize, were suddenly cancelled because one powerful person had died. In other words, if an important leader of a faction fell, then the whole enterprise fell like dominoes because it was all built up around vertical and horizontal bonds of friendship with one key person.¹⁰⁶

The Nordic sources in the High Middle Ages show us hints of the discourse that was employed in communication between patron and client. The scant extant evidence largely comes from letters written by monks and abbots seeking the assistance of their patrons when their monasteries were subjected to abuses. One example is a letter from William of Æbelholt to the powerful landowner Ebbe, kinsman of Archbishop Absalon. He is addressed in the salutation as “our very dear lord and most cordial friend Ebbe” (*domino karrissimo et præcordiali amico Ebboni*). The abbot appeals for his patron’s benevolence, protection, and support in the monks’ conflict with Ebbe’s representatives:

104 Arild Huitfeldt, *Danmarks Riges krønike*, 11, p. 16. Parallels can also be drawn to evidence from elsewhere in Europe, such as Galbert of Bruges’ account of how William Clito and his followers were the stronger military party in the contests with the challenger Thierry of Alsace, but when William died of an injury to his hand, his whole faction collapsed, with the result that Thierry of Alsace acquired the title Count of Flanders.

105 G. Althoff, 2004, p. 107.

106 The key persons in networks were often women. *Sturlunga saga* tells how Snorri Sturluson married his daughter Hallbera to the chieftain Kolbeinn ungi in order to confirm an alliance. When Hallbera died, however, the alliance was no longer valid, as a result of which Kolbeinn soon became one of Snorri’s worst enemies. *Sturlunga saga*, Chapter 62, p. 216, Chapter 83, p. 247. Another example is the system of alliances built up at the start of the twelfth century around the Danish king Niels’s queen, Margareta Fredkulla. When the queen died, the whole network collapsed, resulting in battles for the throne. L. Hermandson, 2000, pp. 172 ff.

we are talking of your steward Bent of Alsønderup and a smith, his tenant, who abuse and kill the animals. On this we have once personally and twice, if we are not mistaken, through our mediators asked for justice from you [...] we now request again your affection, in which we greatly trust, that you will no longer accept the unpunished injustice against the poor brethren, when we and the aforementioned shall stand before you personally at a set time.¹⁰⁷

Several of William's letters to his lords begin with long passages of praise, begging for the favour of the patron. The abbot often titles his protector with the formula "friend and lord" (*amice vel domine*) but portrays himself primarily as a meek and submissive servant.¹⁰⁸ One example of these vertical bonds of friendship is a letter addressed to the king's chancellor, Andreas Sunesen, which opens with the words "William, a humble friend among great friends, to his dearest friend and lord Andreas".¹⁰⁹ William's rhetoric of friendship, however, is not merely part of a submissive form of address. In certain letters he appeals to the reciprocal obligations associated with friendship. In the letter to Ebbe cited above he expects that his lord and friend will "ensure justice". In another letter to Archbishop Absalon the abbot asks to be allowed to go back to France after the monastery barns had burnt down. He greets Absalon with the patriarchal salutation "most loving father" (*pater amantissime*) and writes that: "If therefore we have acted as friends do, this action ought not to be ascribed to the absence of necessary means. And to some have you for all people that can meet you and make your acquaintance, declared that you as a friend and lord return the loving favour".¹¹⁰

Vertical friendship, or the patron-client relationship, can thus be viewed as a contract based on consensus, where both parties had something to gain from the liaison through the exchange of services. In the case of William of Æbelholt, unfortunately, we have access only to the favours the client asks for, such

107 Will. ep. 1 39. The Latin term for mediators is *internuncios*. See also Will. ep. 11 18; Will. ep. 11 19. Other examples are William's correspondence with Count Bernhard of Ratzeburg and his "lord and friend" Archbishop Absalon. Will. ep. 11 15; Will. ep. 11 21.

108 We cannot always determine with certainty whether there really was an established patron-client relationship between William and the lords to whom he wrote his letters. In some cases it may only have been a respectful style of address intended to create a relationship with lords whom he had never met.

109 Will. ep. 11 3. A charter issued by Knud VI mentions that the chancellor Andreas, together with his brother Ebbe and a man named Torben, had been appointed to arrange a reconciliation between the monastery and the local *coloni*. DD/3: 179. Andreas later became archbishop.

110 Will. ep. 11 21.

as protection and material assistance. We can only guess what patrons such as Archbishop Absalon, Ebbe, and Andreas Sunesen requested in return for their friendship.¹¹¹ It was probably spiritual favours in that William, as a representative of the Æbelholt brotherhood, pledged to pray for his benefactors, and more practical help, such as that William, by virtue of his intellectual education and good international contacts, could serve as a scribe for his patrons.

The social and political organization of traditional society was thus, to a large extent, built on vertical bonds of friendship. If we regard this structure solely from a consensus perspective, a picture emerges of a society characterized by harmonious cooperation between patrons and clients, based on contracts that both parties found advantageous. This must ultimately have meant that the vast majority of the medieval population chose voluntarily, after rational consideration, to submit to the lords they deemed most capable of favouring their interests. The consensus perspective, however, risks giving us a distorted idyllic image of medieval power relations. The degree of reciprocity varied greatly in vertical friendships. In several cases the element of reciprocity was almost non-existent, which meant that the rhetoric of friendship was just a way to mask a lord-and-subject relationship. To be able to paint as balanced a picture as possible we shall therefore turn to elucidate the vertical bonds of friendship from a conflict perspective.

2.7 *Friendship – A Free Choice?*

Horace's warning shows the negative side of vertical friendship. There was always an overhanging risk that the relationship would become a coercive one, in which the client, feeling a debt of gratitude to his patron, lost his freedom of personal action. In classical Greek and Roman society, as in the Middle Ages, vertical friendships were established not only by the weak seeking the support and protection of the powerful. The initiative could just as easily come from the powerful one. The envisaged client was then put in a situation where his possibility of turning down the offer of friendship was limited. In the Icelandic sagas we find several cases where chieftains give exclusive gifts to the farmers in order to gain their loyalty. If a farmer refused such a gift, it was interpreted as a rejection of the chieftain's invitation to become friends, which could have the result that the chieftain instead regarded him as his enemy.

In the sources dealing with the situation in Norway there are several examples of how kings, on their own initiative, offer to "grant" their friendship and protection to one or more persons. Yet this was often a concealed threat, since a rejection of the offer of friendship incurred the prince's violent wrath

111 Absalon, Ebbe, and Andreas all belonged to the same social network, the Skjalm clan.

instead. After King Sverre had defeated Magnus Erlingsson, according to the author of *Sverris saga*, he summoned the people of Bergen to an assembly to ensure their loyalty. The meeting began with the chieftain of the Birkebeiner, Håvard Jarlsson, talking as the new king's spokesman. He claimed that the people were obliged to give Sverre "strong and loyal support" because he would be their "comfort" and "defence". Håvard then reminded the people that they ought to learn from previous experience: "Consider who fare the better, those who lean upon his friendship or those who resist his will".¹¹² Then the king himself rose and spoke to the assembly. Sverre employed Christian rhetoric, presenting himself as a king chosen by God, meaning that any opposition was against the will of the Lord and a sign of pride, which was a mortal sin.

The episode thus shows how tradition and innovation are combined when the king appeals to a new ideology of lordship, while Håvard Jarlsson reminds the people of the traditional wisdom of "bending" to the king's friendship. The only alternative to being regarded as the king's friend was to become his enemy. Entering this type of friendship thus had very little to do with free choices. A person was instead faced with an ultimatum: You are either with me or against me.¹¹³

These menacing offers of friendship, uttered with indirect or direct threats, must of course have been most common in the establishment of vertical bonds of friendship, but they also occurred in the forging of horizontal friendship pacts.¹¹⁴ In his account of the formation of factions after the killing of Harald Gille, Snorri proceeds from a letter sent by the group of magnates around the three-year-old King Inge to the network of magnates that had formed around his five-year-old half-brother and co-regent, Sigurd Munn.¹¹⁵ In the letter Inge's

¹¹² *Sverris saga*, 99.123.

¹¹³ Hans Jacob Orning claims that the Norwegian kings deliberately used unpredictable behaviour in relation to their subjects. This was intended to maintain respect in that royal benevolence could never be taken for granted. He writes: "The attraction of gaining the king's friendship lay in the fact that the alternative – his enmity and anger – was as intimidating as his gifts were extravagant". H.J. Orning, 2008, p. 310.

¹¹⁴ These pacts sometimes included different forms of hostages. Fostering, for example, could be a way of keeping a hostage. Medieval banquets have often been interpreted as a ritualized manifestation of friendship. Wojtek Jezierski, however, has shown that an invitation to a feast can also be interpreted as a coercive relationship. The guest's free rational choices were limited, since a refusal to attend a feast was perceived as an insult to the host, who could turn into an enemy. If the guest accepted the invitation he was forced to conform with the host's agenda, which often involved a coercive vertical bond of friendship. Hospitality was rarely unconditional and could thus be exploited as an instrument of power. W. Jezierski, 2015, pp. 139–173.

¹¹⁵ See also RN/1: 80, 1139, and *Morkinskinna*, pp. 381–382.

landed men are urged to take joint action against their common enemy, that is, the coalition consisting of the men supporting the pretenders Sigurd Slembe and Magnus the Blind. The letter writer puts the words in the mouth of the three-year-old king, who asserts that they could not bear the hardships resulting from the fighting unless they had had support from their “friends and good men”. Inge goes on to say that:

It seems to me that now I and my friends are more afflicted with the trouble and distress that we both suffer than you or your friends. Now be so kind as to go to see me as soon as possible and with as many men as possible, and let us be both together whatever happens. Now he is our greatest friend who continues to ensure that we may be always on the best of terms and treated in as equal a manner as possible in everything. But if you neglect to come and are unwilling to respond to my urgent message again, as you have done before, you must be prepared for me to come against you with a force. Let God then judge between us.¹¹⁶

What we see is thus not a letter sent from one individual to another but an endeavour to obtain confirmation of a pact between two elite collectives, the circle around Inge and the one around Sigurd Munn. The letter emphasizes how the collectives are bound by ties of friendship, while simultaneously uttering an explicit threat of force if one party does not accept the offer of friendship.

Sverre Bagge has underlined that the political factions in Norway during the civil wars only to a small extent represented different ideological stances. Nor can the conflicts be interpreted as being between “kindreds” since it was common for kinsmen to fight on different sides. Bagge instead draws the conclusion that “the factional divisions were essentially ‘arbitrary’, based on ‘friendship’, personal loyalty and desire for gain”.¹¹⁷ He goes on to say that the kings’ personal qualities and charisma played a major role for attracting followers: “Friendship was partly based on ‘rational choice’, i.e. desire for gain,

¹¹⁶ *Heimskringla*, XIII.8. After the letter was read aloud to the five-year-old king Sigurd, Snorri says that he replied: “Let all men know that if I have my way I shall go to my brother King Inge as soon as I can”. This may seem like a precocious utterance to come from a king of his age.

¹¹⁷ S. Bagge, 1999, p. 315. Bagge says that the factions displayed a high degree of continuity. From 1161 they represented two different dynasties: Sigurd Magnusson’s and Harald Gille’s descendants (or alleged descendants). S. Bagge, 2010, p. 46. A similar continuity can be discerned in Sweden in the form of the dynasties of Sverker and Erik.

partly on emotional attachment. The sagas, such as *Heimskringla* and *Sverris-saga*, give a good impression of both”.¹¹⁸

It is obvious that bonds of friendship played a crucial part in the formation of political groups in twelfth-century Norway and Denmark.¹¹⁹ It may be questioned, however, whether friendship was always based on free rational choices dictated by calculations of personal gain or amicable feelings. The coalition between the circle around King Inge and the group supporting Sigurd Munn shows that the factions were held together by bonds of friendship, but the pact was also established under threats of violence. When the magnates around the boy-king Sigurd chose to accept the offer of a friendship pact, it was probably a rational decision, but scarcely a free choice since it was made under threat. The coalition was rather formed as a consequence of a realistic political assessment of the situation. Sigurd's men, of course, did not want to face the threat of being forced to fight against both Inge's faction and their common enemy – the coalition between Sigurd Slembe and Magnus the Blind.

The forging of friendship pacts often displayed varying degrees of consensus. Researchers who have studied the feud culture in Iceland, such as Jesse Byock, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Hans Jacob Orning, and Eva Österberg, have observed that the potential to remain neutral in a conflict was limited.¹²⁰ This in turn must have meant that entering a friendship pact was not always a voluntary choice, based on considerations of personal gain or amicable feelings. The Icelandic sagas have several examples of actors who have to accept a friendship pact against their will, on account of social pressure.¹²¹ If they declined the offer, the norms of the honour culture meant that they risked losing their honour and respect as members of society. Using *Njáls saga*, *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, and *Haensa-Póris saga* as examples, Eva Österberg has shown that friendship pacts could be forced by external pressure and that the actors could even be tricked into entering friendship alliances.¹²² The liaisons could mean that an individual was involuntarily drawn into a feud entailing heavy obligations and risking not only his own life but that of his entire family.

118 S. Bagge, 1999, p. 313.

119 On Denmark see L. Hermanson, 2000.

120 J.L. Byock, 1982, pp. 74–97; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1993, pp. 173–184, 203 f.; H.J. Orning, 1997, pp. 483 f.; H.J. Orning, 2013, pp. 57–58; E. Österberg, 2003, pp. 561–569.

121 This has been a classical problem throughout history. Machiavelli writes, for example: “And it will always happen that he who is not your friend will invite you to neutrality, while he who is your friend will call on you to declare yourself openly in arms”, Machiavelli, Ch.21, p. 60.

122 E. Österberg, 2003, pp. 564 ff.; E. Österberg, 2007, pp. 82 ff.

When it comes to vertical bonds of friendship, the degree of free rational choice, emanating from calculations of personal gain or amicable feelings, was of course even more limited. When the people of Bergen met the victors of Fimreite, King Sverre and his men, they probably had no other alternative but to adapt to the situation and accept the offer of the king's friendship. The fact that the author of *Sverris saga* lets the king's spokesman Håvard Jarlsson use the wording "the king's friendship" suggests that the source wants to show that the people were given the opportunity to submit to the new king in honourable forms. Pardons of this type, where submission resulted in the establishment of friendships, are common in both the Norwegian-Icelandic and the Danish source material.¹²³ We find acts of pardon between both individuals and large collectives.

2.8 *Friendship and Mistrust*

In research on the political culture of medieval society there is constant emphasis on the significance of the honourable concept of *fides*, loyalty/fidelity.¹²⁴ In a political structure that was mostly based on personal bonds, loyalty was a fundamental condition for establishing organization and social order. In older medieval society, however, the feud was built into the political structure, and therefore power relations were constantly changing. The social order thus had to be continually recreated in new forms. Loyalty was the foundation for establishing and maintaining a power position. Yet we must also pay attention to the function of the opposite, that is to say, disloyalty, *infidelitas*, which was the seedbed for mistrust. The occurrence of widespread mistrust could be actively used by a person with power ambitions. It was therefore in a person's interest to use direct action or indirect manipulation to create a situation of insecurity where he could offer protection in exchange for loyalty. Mistrust could thus generate power, and it was always interacting with loyalty. Bonds of loyalty, quite simply, were dependent on mistrust if they were to be established at all.

Perhaps the classical example of people with power employing this technique to dominate others can be found in mafia culture. According to the anthropologist Anton Blok, it was the ability to spread fear that was the fundamental

¹²³ For Norway, see H.J. Orning, 2008, pp. 172–175; 189–192. For Denmark, see L. Hermanson 2000, pp. 76; 217; 226 ff.; 247. For Europe, see G. Koziol, 1992 (see also Chapter 3 on the establishment of *xenia*). This form of subordination also represents a courtly ideal of a prince where the Christian ruler governs his subjects through mildness and friendship. The episode in *Sverris saga* where the people are offered an honourable submission can thus be interpreted as royal propaganda in the spirit of the time.

¹²⁴ For recent studies on the medieval notion of *fides*, see e.g. J. Sonntag & C. Zermatten (eds.), 2016.

property qualifying an individual as a *mafioso*. It was therefore important to build up a reputation of violence around one's own person.¹²⁵ The most respected and honourable men in Sicilian society were those who displayed their drive through violent acts, which meant that they had the ability to "manage their own business" and were thus met with respect (*rispetto*).¹²⁶ It was therefore a society with a code of honour, *omertà*, according to which people said nothing about a crime they had witnessed, or suffered, or committed themselves.¹²⁷ A *mafioso* was thus always surrounded with a ramified collective of people who had enjoyed his protection because they had shown him due respect. The creation of an atmosphere of insecurity was therefore a good seedbed for cultivating vertical bonds of friendship.

Tomas Lappalainen has also painted a picture of how Sicily's mafia clans build up their positions using mistrust as an instrument of power. The position of a mafia family rests on its ability to dominate in the use of force within a territory. If the position of the clan is challenged or slighted in any way, violent actions or threats of violence must be used all the time to set examples in order to maintain respect. Lappalainen states that the chief resource of a mafia clan is the reputation for using violence.¹²⁸ This violence can be used against the inhabitants of their own area, but it can also be used to protect the clients against other rival mafia families.

In this protection business the concept of *amicizia*, friendship, is often associated with a coercive relationship established under direct or indirect threat. A representative of a mafia organization can, for example, offer his "friendship" to a business owner, which is synonymous with protection against other clans. If the business owner says no, he risks suffering violence at the hands of the local mafia family. According to the anthropologist Jeremy Boissevain, the *amicizia* arrangement builds on long-term planning with agreements on mutual assistance. The mafia clan ensures its clients that it will help if they get into difficulty, but it simultaneously expects the clients to help out when the clan calls.¹²⁹ If they do not, they find themselves out of favour, which often leads the mafia to take vengeance on the clients or members of their families.

The occurrence of distrust, according to Lappalainen, is an obstacle to collective organization: "The greater the mistrust against others, the more valuable, naturally, is the need for protection. Mistrust is therefore, in a dual

125 A. Blok, 1988 (1st ed. 1974), p. 181; A. Blok, 2001, pp. 173–209.

126 A. Blok, 1988 (1st ed. 1974), pp. 146 f.

127 The term *omertà* comes from the word *omu* 'man'. A. Blok, 1988 (1st ed. 1974), pp. 211 f.

128 T. Lappalainen, 2000 (1st ed. 1993), pp. 148 ff.; 203 ff.; 221 f.

129 J. Boissevain, 1978 (1st ed. 1974), p. 3.

sense, something that favours the power of the mafia".¹³⁰ He writes that an important reason why people in Sicily have never organized collective resistance to the mafia families is the dominance of patron-client relationships:

The networks of 'friendship', the exchange of *favori*, bind people in clans of a kind around powerful persons. This means that solidarity is triggered vertically in society: between powerful and powerless, between rich and poor.¹³¹

The occurrence of a protection racket has a generally deterrent effect in the area where it operates. The service of protection is, so to speak 'in the air', it can be breathed in by anyone in the territory.¹³²

In this society, then, there is no collective trust based on the perception that other people can ultimately be relied on. The occurrence of a social mentality pervaded by a nagging distrust is thus a fertile seedbed for establishing bonds of friendship.¹³³ The power structure in Sicilian society is unstable, however, because it is based so much on personal bonds. When a key person disappears, for example by dying or going to prison, feuds often arise when new leaders try to take over the vacant key position. The surest way for the established stratum of leaders to retain their position is to mount violent operations in order to

¹³⁰ T. Lappalainen, 2000, p. 150.

¹³¹ T. Lappalainen, 2000, p. 144. *Favori* means protection, favour.

¹³² T. Lappalainen, 2000, p. 204. Parallels could be drawn here to late medieval uprisings and collective resistance, which could be interpreted as a disturbance to patron-client relations. In the High Middle Ages popular uprisings were relatively uncommon. Perhaps this was a consequence of the patrons acting to avoid such conflicts, by virtue of their relations with superior authorities.

¹³³ Eva Österberg says that friendship was the opposite pole of violence in the Icelandic sagas. "Enmity creates violence between people and friendship creates peace between people". E. Österberg, 2004, pp. 37, 23 ff., 31. In these contexts, however, it is important to clarify whether one regards friendship as symbolizing an ideal state or friendship as a pragmatic instrument. Power in Icelandic society was based on military strength and personal bonds. A good friend therefore always had to be prepared to resort to violence for the sake of his partners. Anthropological studies of violent deeds, such as murder and manslaughter, have shown that acts in several cultures are committed against people with whom the perpetrator has close emotional ties, for instance friends, relatives, or love partners. Bruce M. Knauft has observed that "intense positive affects hold an underlying potential for extreme anger or violence when the relationship fails or when one party feels ultimately betrayed". B.M. Knauft, cited in A. Blok, 2001, p. 286, n. 21. In a closely related context Anton Blok also quotes Pierre Bourdieu: "Ce sont les plus proches qui nous font mal" (It is those closest to us who hurt us most). P. Bourdieu, cited in A. Blok, 2001, p. 115. The medieval sources have many examples where profound friendship, in various circumstances, can quickly turn to bitter enmity and vice versa.

restore or re-establish their reputation and honour. Parallels can be drawn here to the theories of power propounded by Machiavelli and Hobbes, where the acquisition and maintenance of honour is central. They say that a person in power must be feared if he is to keep his position.¹³⁴ According to Hobbes, the use of force renders honour, which in turn results in renown. When Machiavelli talks of honour he uses the term *reputazione*.¹³⁵

Medieval powers, like the Sicilian mafiosi, built their positions on social capital. They were dependent on the existence of widespread mistrust within the social organization if they were to be able to offer the service of protection. It was therefore in their interest to keep the feud culture alive, as violence was the foundation for their reputation. Norse sources like *Hávamál* and *Rígsþula* testify to this. Several stanzas in *Hávamál* express a mentality of mistrust. This also colours the poet's view of friendship, which is far from the Christian ideas of collective friendship and love. In *Hávamál* we see an individualistic pragmatic outlook, with various pieces of advice on how to cultivate ties of friendship for the best possible personal benefit.

Several stanzas emphasize the importance of not relying on anyone and always being on the lookout for false friends. The mentality of mistrust is noticeable in the very first stanza: "All the doorways, before one enters, should be looked around, should be spied out; it can't be known for certain where enemies are sitting in the hall ahead".¹³⁶ The poem has repeated reminders of the risk of being gullible: "The foolish man thinks that everyone is his friends who laughs with him; he doesn't notice though they say nasty things about him when he sits among the wise".¹³⁷ *Rígsþula* stresses the necessity of having

134 Machiavelli, Ch. 17, pp. 43–44. A Nordic example is the Norwegian missionary king, Olav Trygvasson. Snorri writes that he "was the most cheerful of men and liked games, kindly and condescending, an impetuous person about everything, magnificently generous, a man very distinguished in appearance, surpassing all men in valour in battles, the fiercest of all men when he was angry, torturing his enemies horribly, burning some in fires, having some torn to pieces by savage dogs, maiming some or having them thrown over high cliffs. As a result his friends were very fond of him, while his enemies were afraid of him. So his success was great, because some did his will with love and friendliness, while some did it out of fear". *Heimskringla*, v1.92. See also B. Sawyer, 2008, p. 49.

135 Machiavelli, Ch. 21, pp. 59–61; T. Lappalainen, 2000, p. 221.

136 *Sayings of the High One (Hávamál)*, 1.13. "Gáttir allar áður gangi fram um skoðast skyli, um skyggnast skyli, því að óvíst er að vita hvar óvinir sitja á fleti fyrir". <http://www.snerpa.is/net/kvaedi/havamal.htm>.

137 *Sayings of the High One (Hávamál)*, 24.16 See also verse 25: "The foolish man thinks that everyone is his friend who laughs with him: but then he finds when he comes to the Assembly that he has few to speak on his behalf". Eva Österberg has emphasized how individualism and group dependence go hand in hand as a recurrent theme in several medieval works such as *Hávamál*. E. Österberg, 2008, p. 58.

a reputation to create and maintain a position of power. When the god Rig asks his son Jarl to honour his inheritance, the son obeys this request by forcibly acquiring land and farms (see Chapter 2). The significance of reputation for acquiring social capital, especially in connection with shifts of power, is also noticeable in the Danish source material. Saxo Grammaticus describes on several occasions how young princes gain supporters through successful military campaigns abroad, after which they enter the struggle for the Danish crown.¹³⁸ The potential to use force and instil fear was thus a coveted symbolic capital that gave respect in the field of power politics.¹³⁹

2.9 *Power, Reputation, Violence, and Friendship*

Nordic and western European sources bear witness to the constant interaction between violence and friendship – a pragmatic interaction that, at first sight, contrasts sharply with the ideals of friendship put forth in the clerical and courtly literature. In areas that were torn apart by feuds, certain actors strove to acquire a superior position by making peace/*pax* and thereby security/*securitas* dependent on their benevolence.¹⁴⁰ To achieve this they tried to get as many people as possible to swear friendship and loyalty, *amicitia et fides*, to them. Traditional lordship was based on and legitimized by a lord controlling the use of force in one or more territories.

Controlling violence, however, did not need to be synonymous with combating it. It was more a matter of steering the use of force in society and making it dependent on a personal centre. While power was dependent on a leader's ability to attain a central position in the flow of information, gifts, and services, it was also dependent on his capacity to control the flow of violent acts. If someone started committing such acts without his active help, or his indirect support, or if people did not turn to him when they sought protection, he risked losing his power.

A European example of the interaction between power, reputation, violence, and friendship can be found in the chronicles of Galbert of Bruges and Gautier of Théroutanne about the feud that resulted in the murder of Charles the Good of Flanders. Galbert writes that the count had no enemies among his powerful "neighbours" outside the county, because they feared him or because they were bound to the Flemish count through "peace and bonds of love". They

138 L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 119 ff.; 127 ff.; 178.

139 Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical concept of *symbolic capital* is thus close to the phenomenon of honour. For honour as a concept see P. Meulengracht-Sørensen, 1993.

140 Compare the concepts of *mund* (protection) and *gríð* (peace). Giving *gríð* was the same as giving pardon and ensuring peace. This peace was a truce limited to a specific area and dependent on the victor's goodwill. Through time the word *gríð* became synonymous with *mund*. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1993, pp. 269 f.

therefore preferred to exchange gifts and favours with him.¹⁴¹ His most serious enemies were to be found instead among his own rebellious magnates.

The leader of the conspiracy and the revolt against the count was the head of the Erembald clan, Bertulf. He controlled the administrative apparatus of the county and its ecclesiastical organization by occupying offices such as chancellor (*cancellarius*) and provost (*praepositus*). The power of the clan had grown through time to become so great that it was a threat to the count's own position (see Chapter 2). Galbert and Gautier of Théroutanne write that Bertulf attained his unique power position by first making himself the head of the clan (*pater familias*), after which he created a hard inner core of loyal followers, mainly consisting of his nephews and affines.¹⁴² Apart from this inner circle, he surrounded himself with a considerable retinue of relatives, friends, and vassals, whose positions were dependent on Bertulf's generosity. The uncle-nephew bond was the glue that held his inner circle together. Bertulf thus seems to have preferred these bonds to direct blood ties.¹⁴³

Galbert goes on to write that he tried to make the reputation of the Erembald clan known everywhere:

he armed his kinsmen for strife and discord; and he found enemies for them to fight in order to make it known to everyone that he and his nephews were so powerful and strong that no one in the realm could resist them or prevail against them.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Galbert, Chapter 4, p. 92.

¹⁴² Galbert, Chapter 13, p. 116; Gautier, Chapter 14. Bertulf is like Bishop Absalon, yet another example of the difficulty of categorizing twelfth-century aristocrats as belonging to either the clerical or the secular elite. In the Nordic source material there are several examples of bishops who mainly use nephews to build up their socio-political capital. The use of affines such as nephews as a deliberate strategy for network building was also widespread in Iceland.

¹⁴³ J.B. Ross, 1959, p. 373. There are several reasons why Bertulf chose to let his nephews be his closest allies. One explanation may be that these bonds were a result of his own kinship strategies, so that the nephews had him to thank for their position – a situation that functioned as an extra guarantee of loyalty. But others were involved in the conspiracy too, Bertulf's brothers Didier Hacket and Wulfric Cnop. On the creations of "clans" with the aid of nephews, brothers-in-law, and sons-in-law (*affines*) in the Sicilian mafia, see A. Blok, 2001, pp. 89 f. The use of the term "clan" seems particularly appropriate since these are collectives constructed on the basis of nephews and affines all of whom were dependent on a clan chief. When Galbert himself talks of Bertulf's entire kin he uses words like *cognatio* or *genus*. Alan V. Murray chooses to call the clan "the clan of Bertulf" because contemporary sources refer only to Bertulf as the head of the clan, not Erembald. A.V. Murray, 2009, pp. 195, 199.

¹⁴⁴ Galbert, Chapter 13, p. 116. Parallels can be drawn to the Norman knights' fighting units, which were bound together by ties of kinship and friendship. See Chapter 2.

The violent ravages and private warfare of the clan meant that an autonomous power arose in the county that was no longer dependent on the count. Charles the Good thus risked losing control, not just over the use of force in his own county, but also over his position as a key person in the social network of the Flemish nobility. Bertulf's dynamic kinship strategies had the result that several of the aristocracy's most prominent members were married into the Erembald clan. Galbert writes that Bertulf had friends in different parts of the county who were bound to him through *amicitia*. These appear to have been vertical bonds of friendship. The author mentions, for example, that after the revolt he dispatched messages to his allied friends in Veurne and ordered them to swear loyalty to William of Ypres.¹⁴⁵ Perhaps it was the superior military and social capital of the clan that was the reason why Count Charles chose to meet the threat by starting a judicial process (*calumniae*) intended to declare the clan members as serfs (see Chapter 2).¹⁴⁶ He also chose to favour the Thancmar clan who were the Erembald's arch-enemy.¹⁴⁷ All in all these actions put the Erembald-clan in a desperate situation that prepared the ground for the plot.

The description by Galbert of Bruges and Gautier of Théroutanne of the feud that resulted in the murder of Charles the Good has many features in common with accounts of feuds in the Norwegian-Icelandic sagas. In these sources a feud often begins with some form of provocation, as one party seeks to test the adversary's strength or have his rights generally acknowledged. Like the Sicilian mafia conflicts, the Norse feuds were often triggered by shifts in power or by the entry of new actors on the political stage. In Iceland it could be an ambitious young chieftain who wanted to build up an independent power base or merely wanted to show through vigorous deeds that he was upholding the

145 Galbert, Chapter 25, p. 145. When the news of the count's death reached William, the chronicle says that he sent a messenger to Bertulf to offer his "help". The messenger is reported to have conveyed the following words to Bertulf: "My lord and your close friend, William of Ypres, sends his sincere greetings and his friendship and he will assist you immediately in every conceivable way". Galbert, Chapter 25, p. 143. Bertulf accepts the pact of friendship, which in practice would mean that William became Count of Flanders. But this count was in a debt of gratitude to Bertulf, who reckoned that William would be benevolently disposed towards the Erembald clan. Galbert Chapter 25, p. 144 and n. 5, the translator's commentary.

146 When the feud between the Erembald clan and the count had started (partly as a consequence of the plunder of Charles's peasants by Bertulf's nephew Borsiard, after which the count took revenge by burning down Borsiard's house), Bertulf sent mediators to Charles's court. These had ties to both the count and the Erembald clan. The mediators asked Charles to "turn his wrath away from them and mercifully take them back into his friendship". Galbert, Chapter 10, p. 105 f.

147 Galbert, Chapter 9, p. 102; Chapter 10, p. 105–106.

inherited honour of the family.¹⁴⁸ One way to demonstrate this honour was to display the ability to protect and help clients who found themselves in difficulty. In Norway, Denmark, and Sweden the feuds that later escalated into outright wars usually started with the death of a king or during the reign of an under-age king. In Denmark the career of the Skjalm clan can be compared to the way the Erembald clan consolidated its power.¹⁴⁹ Yet there is an important difference here in that the representatives of the Skjalm group chose to ally themselves with a royal pretender in the struggle against the reigning king, Svend Grathe.¹⁵⁰ In Sweden the Folkungar, with their clan chief Birger Brosa, developed into a second power in the kingdom in much the same way as the Erembald clan under Bertulf. Because of the fighting for the throne, this “clan” likewise chose to support one of the royal dynasties.¹⁵¹ In practice, however, it appears to have been the military might of the Folkungar that made them the most significant power factor in Sweden up to the middle of the thirteenth century. In Norway feuds between different magnate families tended to develop into contests for the throne in that the magnates sought the support of the kings or produced their own claimants to the throne.¹⁵²

Charles the Good tried by judicial means to counter the threat from the Erembald clan. Similar strategies were adopted by the Scandinavian kings. Saxo tells, for example, of how Valdemar the Great used the law to condemn usurpers of royal blood belonging to rival branches of the family. He had previously pardoned them and granted them his friendship, but when they were once again revealed as conspirators, Saxo says that they were deprived of the king’s *amicitia* and sentenced for high treason.¹⁵³ The Danish *Lex Castrensis* and the Swedish *Skänninge Statute* can also be seen as examples of how the Nordic

148 A chieftaincy (*goðorð*) was often short-lived, not lasting more than two or three generations. The consequence was constantly shifting power centres. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1993, p. 64.

149 The leading figure in the Skjalm clan, Bishop Absalon, resembled Bertulf in that he held the foremost offices in the realm, being both bishop of Roskilde and archbishop. His successor Andreas Sunesen was first chancellor and then archbishop.

150 L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 209–225. William of Ypres, however, was a cousin of Charles the Good.

151 P. Line, 2007, pp. 175–189. Karl Leyser draws parallels between the power strategies of the Erembald clan and those of Roger of Salisbury’s family in England under Henry I and the Garland clan in France under Louis VI. K. Leyser, 1963, pp. 51 ff.

152 An example is Gregorius Dagsson, who according to *Ágrip* and *Morkinskinna* became embroiled in a feud with a magnate who had personal ties to King Sigurd, which meant that Gregorius became Sigurd’s enemy. He then turned to King Inge for support, and conflict broke out between Sigurd and Inge. S. Bagge, 2010.

153 L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 238 ff.; L. Hermanson, 2013, pp. 107–140.

kings applied legal instruments to prevent the rise of rivals in the use of force. Another method employed to pacify other people with power in the kingdom was to let them swear *coniurationes*, sacred oaths of loyalty pledging fidelity and friendship to the king.

2.10 *Friendship – A Two-Edged Sword*

If we analyse the role of friendships in the Middle Ages from a conflict perspective, a picture emerges of a feud society with widespread mistrust exploited by rival leaders. Friendship in this context is equated with a protector relationship where the patron determines the conditions. The client's freedom of choice was thus extremely restricted. The degree of freedom of choice also varied when factions were formed through horizontal pacts of friendship. The political distance that arose in connection with a feud not infrequently forced individuals to enter into pacts. In these situations friendship, *amicitia*, was a pragmatic instrument associated with power and realpolitik.

In the chaos that arose after the murder of Charles the Good, Galbert tells of how the burghers of Bruges was busy looking for allies: "they secretly sent messengers to Gervaise and his men, promising mutual faith and friendship and pledging the most faithful loyalty".¹⁵⁴ Here the author uses the expression "*componentes de fide et amicitia et fidissima securitate*". In this society a formula like this was often an agreement that was binding only during an ongoing conflict.¹⁵⁵ The choice of friends thus followed an eat-or-be-eaten logic according to which it was simply a matter of using tactical manoeuvres to anticipate events.

Representatives of the conflict perspective among historians sometimes proceed, more or less unconsciously, from a standpoint of state idealism. Its roots can be traced back all the way to Thomas Hobbes, who regarded the pre-state society as a war of every man against every man (see the Introduction). Several scholars who have studied the political culture of eleventh – and twelfth-century Europe have interpreted it as being characterized by "feudal anarchy".¹⁵⁶ The state with its institutions and written laws thus marks a decisive step in the development towards "civilization".

154 Galbert, Chapter 27, p. 150. Gervais was the castellan of Bruges who was besieging the traitors.

155 Galbert, Chapter 27, p. 150. The term *amicitia* is used in this context as part of a ritualized political language.

156 Research inspired by historical materialism, as exemplified by Georges Duby and Guy Bois, interprets feudal relations of protection as a means of exploitation. Another (albeit kindred) conflict perspective can be found in scholars such as Thomas Bisson, one of the

An interpretative model from a pure conflict perspective, then, paints a picture in which the societal functions of friendship are chiefly associated with force, coercion, and conflict. This interpretation is in stark contrast to the consensus model according to which bonds of friendship represented love, accord, and voluntary cooperation. These different perspectives, however, are rarely applied in their purest forms, yet they have set their stamp on research into friendship. From empirical studies of the medieval source material it is impossible to arrive at a conclusion that supports one or the other interpretative model. The fact is that the sources demonstrate a basic contrast between how bonds of friendship functioned in practice and how they were intended to function on the ideological level. The two-edged picture of friendship conveyed by the source material is probably one of the reasons why today's research on friendship is divided into an ideological-spiritual and a pragmatic-political orientation.

Classical and medieval authors were by no means unaware of this contrast. Everyday social and political relations were dominated by pragmatic and self-interested friendship, but the ancient and Christian thinkers simultaneously felt a powerful need to discuss "true friendship", that is to say, elevated spiritual friendship. This bond represented a vision of a different society, where mistrust was replaced by love and brotherhood and where self-interest and individualism were replaced by collectivism. The eleventh – and twelfth-century Christian cult of spiritual friendship could thus be interpreted as an intellectual reaction to the unstable social organization of the feud society.

The fact that the political order was dependent on the leader who happened to dominate in the use of force within a territory entailed major problems for the church when it sought to translate the Christian ideology into practice. Research often emphasizes the "collectivism" of medieval society and the fact that the medieval person was a "collective individual".¹⁵⁷ This is true to a certain extent, but we should also bear in mind the mentality of mistrust in the age of the feud and its consequences for the organization of society. The dominance of protector relations in which solidarity was triggered vertically in society by people allying with the local honourable *potentes* in the form of "bonds of friendship" must have made it hard for the church to gain a hearing for its collectivistic ideal. As in the case of the vertical bonds of mafia culture,

leading advocates of the thesis that eleventh – and twelfth-century Europe was characterized by "feudal anarchy". See G. Duby, 1953, G. Bois, 1992 and T.N. Bisson 1994 & 1995.

¹⁵⁷ See e.g. C. Morris, 1991 (1st ed. 1972); A. Gurevich, 1997. I myself have defended this view, in a way that lacked nuance and without any detailed consideration of vertical patron relations. L. Hermanson, 2004, pp. 61–99.

protector relations in the Middle Ages could also be an obstacle to collective coordination. Patron-client relations made it extremely difficult (economically and otherwise) for the ecclesiastical organization to work efficiently in an area. The inhabitants of a locality, like the church itself, were primarily dependent on the patron who happened to have the power at any particular time.¹⁵⁸

In Scandinavia and Europe, a great many diplomas from the eleventh and twelfth centuries testify to the church's difficulty in asserting its authority on the local level. At the same time, the constant feuds could have devastating consequences for monasteries and churches.¹⁵⁹ The tenth – and eleventh-century God's Peace movement, which saw large collective manifestations under the auspices of the church, proclaiming peace and concord, was part of the ambition to implement the Christian ideology in practice.¹⁶⁰ The twelfth-century affirmation of spiritual friendship and Christian brotherhood can be interpreted as a development of these ideals.

As we have observed before, however, sources such as the *Lex Castrensis* and the *Skänninge Statute* show that even kings had problems asserting their authority in a feud society pervaded by relations of protection.¹⁶¹ During the twelfth century several Scandinavian kings were killed as part of minor feuds or turbulent meetings of the *thing*. Nordic and European princes were constantly endeavouring to gain control over the exercise of force in their realms and duchies so that they could portray themselves as princes of peace. The patronage systems, however, were a serious obstacle to any form of collective organization under the auspices of the king. This could be everything from tax collection to administering the call-up of military forces. The Norse and Danish sources show that the kings in several situations themselves acted in accordance with the logic of the patronage system, but we see at the same time how they sought new ways in which to assert their authority. An important step in this direction was that they could ignore the rules and norms of the protection society by portraying themselves as ecclesiastical patrons. During the twelfth century the Scandinavian kings therefore made active use of the Christian ideology of friendship by trying in various ways to translate the ideology into practice.

158 At the same time, of course, churches and monasteries had a large debt of gratitude to their benefactors.

159 See e.g. C. Breengaard, 1982. In this connection, however, it should be stressed that members of the secular church and the monastic movement often took an active part in the conflicts themselves. See e.g. P. Geary, 1994a, pp. 130–160; L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 165 ff.

160 Another element, of course, was the crusades.

161 Kurt Villads Jensen interprets *Lex Castrensis* as part of the efforts by the crown to tackle the problems of controlling the magnates' private armies and feuds. K.V. Jensen, 2002, pp. 76 ff.

2.11 The Popular Prince in *Heimskringla* and *Gesta Danorum*

In early medieval society there was a significant distance between the Christian ideology of lordship and how the kings governed in practice. Joseph Canning has described the Carolingian theory of lordship as “an amalgam of theocracy, consent and fidelity”.¹⁶² This dualism meant that the Carolingian prince was regarded as chosen by God, but he was simultaneously a *primus inter pares* in relation to the other aristocratic families in the empire. This meant that royal rule rested to a large extent on cooperation with all the magnates who had sworn loyalty to the king. *Consensus fidelium*, that is, mutual understanding between the prince and his aristocratic allies, was thus a fundamental principle of Carolingian lordship.¹⁶³ Magnates were quite simply obliged to give advice (*consilium*) to the ruler, and therefore government was collective, and the prince in turn was obliged to show the magnates benevolence and due respect.

This traditional ideal of lordship, resting on a fruitful reciprocal exchange between the king and his men, was widespread in Europe. The ideal lived on into the High Middle Ages. German sources from the tenth and the eleventh centuries hail the amiable prince who generously granted the magnates’ wishes by giving them various rewards. According to Gerd Althoff, it was an ideal whereby the ruler “used his power extensively not for the elevation of his own position but rather for the honour of his friends and followers”.¹⁶⁴ In practice, however, this policy meant that the king purchased the loyalty and friendship of the magnates. He also monopolized the flow of information, material resources, and favours to his own person, and therefore the magnates became dependent on him. In Nordic sources this ideal has its counterpart in the “popular” prince, the Old Norse adjective *vinsæll*, blessed with many friends.

In Snorri’s *Heimskringla* several portrayals of princes begin with the author telling us whether the king in question was well liked by the people and his nearest men or not. Magnus the Blind and his opponent Harald Gille are described as being each other’s opposites in many respects:

Magnús was more handsome than any man that was then in Norway. He was a proud-minded and stern person, a man of great ability, and his father’s popularity was what most ensured him the friendship of the common people. He was a great drinker, avaricious, unfriendly and difficult to deal with. Haraldr gilli was affable, cheerful, playful, humble, generous, so that

¹⁶² J. Canning, 1996, p. 45.

¹⁶³ J. Canning, 1996, p. 60; J. Hannig, 1982.

¹⁶⁴ G. Althoff, 1999, p. 100.

he spared nothing for his friends, open to advice, so that he let others make decisions with him on anything they wanted.¹⁶⁵

Snorri applies similar contrasting techniques when he portrays the rival pretenders Eystein Haraldsson and Inge the Hunchback. Eystein is said to be “a sensible and intelligent person, but what was most detrimental to his authority was that he was avaricious and greedy for wealth”. The deformed Inge was instead “pleasant with his friends, generous with wealth, mostly letting leading men make decisions about the government with him, popular with ordinary people, and all of this very much attracted power and followers to him”.¹⁶⁶ These bonds of friendship between the king and the collective appear to have been inherited in certain areas. Snorri says that the *Víkverjar* (men from present-day Bohuslän) were the faithful friends of King Magnus Erlingsson and Jarl Erling: “The *Víkverjar* were staunch friends of King Magnús and Erlingr. This was chiefly on account of the popularity of King Inge Haraldsson, for the *Víkverjar* had often served under that standard with their support”.¹⁶⁷

The father of Magnus the Blind, Sigurd the Crusader, is described by Snorri as a typical warrior king. When Sigurd finds himself in battle with Muslim “vikings” off the coast of Spain, the author quotes a poem by the skald Halldor Skvaldri:

Mighty deeds of the monarch
I must tell, that happened.
in Spain; Ván's daylight's slinger,
assaulted Sintré proudly.
Opposing the stern prince
proved, for warriors, rather
fearsome, but they flatly
refused God's law, offered to them.¹⁶⁸

During the crusade Sigurd is described as a generous commander who gives war booty to his friends.¹⁶⁹ He ruled the kingdom of Norway together with his

¹⁶⁵ *Heimskringla*, XIII.1. Snorri thus believes that Magnus the Blind had not had gained the friendship of the people through his own merits. He had not won their trust through active measures based on goodwill.

¹⁶⁶ *Heimskringla*, XIV.22.

¹⁶⁷ *Heimskringla*, XVI.10.

¹⁶⁸ *Heimskringla*, XII.4.

¹⁶⁹ The Christian purpose of the crusade is not highlighted by Snorri. In foreign sources, however, Sigurd is portrayed as one of the few Norse Christian ideal princes. In a letter written by the abbot Peter the Venerable of Cluny he is called *nostre societatis amico*, which shows

half-brothers Eystein and Olav Magnusson. When Sigurd was campaigning abroad, his brother Eystein was busy doing things that “benefited the country”, such as expanding the ecclesiastical organization and consolidating the kingdom by forging bonds of friendship with the inhabitants of Jämtland. Snorri writes that the king sent word to Jämtland,

to the wisest and greatest people, inviting them to visit him, and he welcomed all who came with much warmth and sent them on their way with friendly gifts, thus drawing them into friendship with him. And since many of them became accustomed to going to him and accepted his gifts, while some sent him gifts who did not visit him, so he got himself on completely friendly terms with all the people that were in authority in the land.¹⁷⁰

The loyalty of the people of Jämtland to the Norwegian kings had previously varied, as during certain periods they had instead turned to “the king of the Swedes for anything they wanted”. King Eystein gave a speech to the men of Jämtland in which he declared that they had much more to gain by swearing loyalty to the Norwegian king. After the king’s eloquent speech, Snorri says that the listeners themselves

suggested to him and asked him if they might switch to fealty to King Eysteinn, and claimed that this was what they both needed and must have. Their friendship (*félagsskap*) became so close that the Jamtr handed over all their land to the rule of King Eysteinn. In order to achieve this, the men of the ruling class there took oaths of loyalty from all the people, after that going to King Eysteinn and swearing the land to him, and this has remained valid ever since. King Eysteinn won Jamtaland by the use of reason, and not by making attacks like some of his predecessors.¹⁷¹

As could have been the case with the men of Viken, then, the Jämtlanders are attached to the king through a personal friendship confirmed by oath. One

that Sigurd had close ties to the reform movement (his crusade is also mentioned by the churchman Orderic Vitalis in Normandy). RN/1: 65. Snorri appears to represent the view that work for the church is best done on the home front. The crusades in *Heimskringla* are therefore primarily depicted as traditional military campaigns.

170 *Heimskringla*, XII.15.

171 *Heimskringla*, XII.15. A more accurate translation of the Icelandic term *félagsskap* (*Heimskringla*, III.15, p. 255, *Íslensk fornrit* XXVII) is companionship or partnership.

difference, however, is that the Viken friendship is primarily associated with an agreement about military support.

Snorri's ideal of lordship is consequently the popular prince who, like the Icelandic chieftains, builds up his power from below through gifts and humility. As a result he gains "the friendship of the people". Power comes from the people and it is best acquired through friendship with the magnates, who act as the people's representatives. The king by the grace of God, who receives his power from above by serving in a divine office and thereby has the sovereign right to govern, is entirely absent in *Heimskringla*.¹⁷² Snorri's kings, such as Harald Gille, Eystein Magnusson and Inge the Hunchback, are lords and friends at the same time. When it comes to the kings' relation with the magnates, the author's ideal appears to be very similar to the Carolingian *consensus fidelium*. Harald Gille and Inge the Hunchback willingly accept advice and let their friends participate in decision making. Like the amiable Ottonian princes, they satisfy the magnates' wishes through generosity and marks of distinction.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Magnus Erlingsson's coronation in 1160 is primarily described by Snorri as a result of a pragmatic alliance between Erling the jarl and Eystein the archbishop. The bishop is described as a powerful man who enjoyed strong support in Trøndelag because most magnates were tied to him through kinship and friendship. *Heimskringla*, XVI.16 (compare how Galbert of Bruges described the power base of the clan chief Bertulf, see p. 177). When Erling decides to let the archbishop consecrate Magnus as king, the main justification is that "no one will afterwards be able to deprive him of the kingdom lawfully". The jarl refers here to other crowned kings such as William the Bastard and Svend Estridsen. After the coronation a grand banquet was held in the royal palace. At this feast Erling and Magnus bestowed magnificent gifts on the archbishop and his other bishops. *Heimskringla*, XVI.21, XVI.22. The Christian ideological meaning of the coronation is thus not prominent in *Heimskringla*. The same is true of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*. The author makes frequent use of the *Roskilde Chronicle* (1138) but does not say a word about the statement in that source to the effect that Valdemar was crowned as king in 1157. That information can be found in the supplement to the chronicle. The coronation may however have been fabricated by the author of the source. Saxo's account of Knud VI's coronation in Ringsted in 1170 cannot be interpreted as a reflection of the Christian *rex iustus* ideology. On the contrary, the author appears to regard the ceremony as a sign of royal arrogance. L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 188, 195, 204. The portal figures of the *rex iustus* ideology, the saint-kings, are not praised to the skies by Saxo or Snorri. On Snorri's view of saint-kings see also B. Sawyer, 2008, pp. 50 ff.

¹⁷³ Sverre Bagge, like many other Norwegian historians, interprets the kings as tools for different groups of aristocrats. S. Bagge, 2010, pp. 40–53. This may explain why the aristocracy preferred mild, generous kings who allowed themselves to be led by magnates, such as the foreigner Harald Gille and the hunchback Inge Haraldsson. Ruling as a king appointed by the magnates must have been a thankless task, and the majority of these kings met a sudden death. In *Sverris saga* Magnus Erlingsson says that he was nominated as king when he was a child. He observes that he "could be master of neither word nor oath" and says with sorrow that "I strove not for the kingdom, and little pleasure and ease have I

Greedy and miserly kings, such as Magnus the Blind and Eystein Haraldsson, in contrast, come to a bitter end because they lose the friendship of the magnates and the people.¹⁷⁴

The significance of friendship ties and generosity probably increased in periods of conflict, as was the case in twelfth-century Norway. In *Heimskringla* we read time and again of how pretenders to the throne waste a lot of time and effort “gathering men” since they rarely have large permanent retinues. It is not until the latter half of the twelfth century that we see more lasting military groups loyal to the king, such as the Birkebeiner, which meant that the meaning of friendship pacts had changed.

Saxo Grammaticus, like Snorri, represents a friendship-based ideology of consensus where the king reigns in concord with his friends among the aristocracy. In *Gesta Danorum* the Danish rulers, like Snorri’s kings, have ultimately received their power from the people.¹⁷⁵ The most significant difference between Saxo and Snorri is that *Gesta Danorum* is a work of propaganda, especially for the Danish realm and its people. The kingdom and the Danes are often combined as a constant: the fatherland, *patria*.¹⁷⁶ Saxo casts his Denmark in a classical

had in the kingdom”. *Sverris saga*, 89.112. In practice the policy of the magnates was to set up a pretender, let him fight and conquer estates. Then they milked the king of as much as possible before he was killed. There was also a risk that the pretender would be abandoned by his allies if he did not meet their expectations. The contests for the throne can thus be regarded as a continuation of the plunder economy of the Viking Age. The Birkebeiner and the Bagler managed to reach a peace agreement in 1208, according to which the warmongers on either side united in a joint “Viking raid” on the Hebrides, where they plundered the monastery on Iona. *Baglersaga*, p. 339; C. Krag, 2000, p. 129. Bagge thinks that King Sverre’s strong leadership marked a change in the relationship between the king, the aristocracy, and the people. Sverre’s own merits legitimized his new hierarchical government, which was supported by his loyal soldiers, who fought in the leader’s many victories. Thus a close-knit new elite was established, tightly connected to the king. S. Bagge, 2010, pp. 53–67. On the plunder economy, see T. Lindkvist, 1988.

174 Snorri, however, rarely portrays the kings entirely in black and white. He also highlights the good sides of Magnus the Blind and Eystein Haraldsson, and lets the more negative features of Harald Gille and Inge the Hunchback stand out on various occasions. The most decidedly idealized portraits are those of certain magnates such as Gregorius Dagsson.

175 In *Gesta Danorum* there are several episodes that symbolically illustrate how the Danish kings were upheld by the people. See e.g. L. Hermanson, 2000, p. 206.

176 Nanna Damsholt says that *the king* and the people were assessed as one constant: the fatherland. N. Damsholt, 1975, p. 152. Inge Skovgaard-Petersen classifies *Gesta Danorum* as belonging to the genre *Ab origine gentis*, “the history of a people”. I. Skovgaard-Petersen, 1987, pp. 90 ff. Herwig Wolfram and Walter Pohl claim that *origines gentium* did not exist as a separate genre, neither in antiquity nor in the Middle Ages. Origin myths were nevertheless a common element in several sources which could belong to different genres. H. Wolfram & W. Pohl 2003, pp. 174–183.

Roman mould which he adapts to northern European norms and ideals. As with Cicero, dedication to one's native land is the supreme virtue. In Saxo's history the people are a legitimizing force. Kings who act against the will of the people forfeit their right to lead the country. Just royal government, according to Saxo, should rest on a friendship between the king and the inhabitants of the country. A running theme is that the aristocracy often act as the people's representatives, as is also the case in Snorri.¹⁷⁷

Apart from the view of the fatherland and the church, the similarities between Saxo and Snorri are striking, especially as regards the emphasis on the amicable relationship between the king and the aristocrats, where gifts and marks of honour play a central role. Saxo's ancient hero kings such as Harald Hildetand act like popular, generous princes, bestowing gifts and distinctions on the magnates. Before the legendary Battle of Bråvalla, the author describes the relationship between Harald Hildetand and his armed retinue: "The king had extended his patronage to all these warriors in a generous and friendly fashion; held in highest honour by him, they received swords chased with gold and the choicest spoils of war".¹⁷⁸

The Danish king Svend Grathe, who fought with Valdemar the Great for the throne, is portrayed as a man who had lost his right to the throne since he had not had been anxious to secure the friendship of the people and the aristocracy. The people's judgement on Svend Grathe was hard, and therefore Valdemar's claim to the throne was legitimate. Svend is described as a *rex tyrannus*, in contrast to Valdemar I who is portrayed as a *rex iustus* because he enjoys the friendship of the people. All of Denmark's misfortunes are King Svend's fault. His mistakes are attributed to his relationship to the people:

Sven acquired the chief command more by good fortune than by his own vigour, but his assumption of this did nothing to effect the restoration of Danish prosperity and fame. So unblest was he in popularity and ineffectual in rule that he could not draw the hearts of his subjects.¹⁷⁹

The people's hatred for the king means that they are unable to assume their collective responsibility and defend the kingdom against the Wends. The reason was that they could not serve the king with "sincere fidelity" because they did not consider their submission to be honourable. Towards the end of his

¹⁷⁷ But not always. There are episodes where the people are described as a mob or an unruly force who did not know what was best for them.

¹⁷⁸ Saxo, 8.2.7. Here Saxo's ideal ruler is fully in line with the Ottonian ideal.

¹⁷⁹ Saxo, 11.1.1.

reign Svend Grathe lost the support of the most powerful aristocratic networks when he chose to rely on relations of service with officials of low birth rather than bonds of friendship with the aristocracy.¹⁸⁰ Saxo often lets the people be a moral yardstick, and he points out that the fatherland belongs jointly to the people and the king. One example is when Svend Grathe decides to purchase the assistance of the Saxon duke Henry the Lion in the desperate struggle of the Danes against the Wends. Saxo declares here that “Henry’s friendship was not particularly profitable, being more of the kind that can be bought and sold”. The duke does not keep his promise of assistance, as a result of which Svend fails to reach a lasting peace with the Wends:

The affair unleashed the people’s anger all the more bitterly against him, for they considered it shameful that a state of peace should be sought with rich gifts instead of arms, and that the commonwealth should be cheated through its ruler’s weakness.¹⁸¹

Saxo thus views the Danish kingdom as the shared property of the people and the king, which it is their duty to manage together in the best possible manner. The picture of Svend Grathe is in stark contrast to the ancestor of the Valdemarians, the Duke of Schleswig, Knud Lavard, who is portrayed as the beloved friend of the people. When the Danes hear the news of his murder, there is immediate national mourning: “they straightway abandoned the joyful celebrations being held at that time of year and exchanged the seasonal customs for grief; as they bewailed his passing, both sexes joined their groans in unison, like those of a single companion”.¹⁸²

Saxo describes the relationship between the king, the aristocracy, the people, and the fatherland as one of mutual loyalty, based on friendship and love. Whoever breaks this sacred pact is regarded as an eternally damned oath breaker. Neither Saxo nor Snorri can thus be interpreted as ardent advocates of the Christian ideal of *rex Dei*, a prince whose power was sovereign because his office was instituted by God.¹⁸³ Instead they stand for a traditional technique of lordship which follows the norms and rules of the gift society. In this connection it is the kings’ personality and inner qualities that determine whether they receive the people’s friendship or not.

180 For a more detailed analysis of how Svend Grathe lost the support and friendship of the aristocracy, see L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 214–226.

181 Saxo, 14.15.6.

182 Saxo, 13.7.2.

183 As noted in Chapter 2, Saxo claims that kings like Svend Estridsen and even Valdemar I were subordinate to the power of the church and the bishops.

This political culture where loyalty was a bilateral bond, resting on *fides* between the ruler and his subjects, is often invisible in sources written by churchmen in royal service, such as diplomas, king's mirrors, and saints' legends. Here friendship represents something quite different from a reciprocal alliance. These sources proclaim that the king has received his power from God, and therefore his friendship with the subjects is regarded as a unilateral bond and a favour granted from above.

3 Friendship and the Christian Ideology of Lordship

As noted above, the eleventh and twelfth centuries saw the start of a fundamental change in the political structure in Europe's principalities. Initially it was a matter of changes on an ideological level, proceeding from the top social stratum of intellectuals. Medieval political theories mainly circled around the role of the monarchy in society.¹⁸⁴ The Investiture Controversy resulted in the creation of different ideology-producing strata, representing divergent opinions about the power position of the monarchy and its relationship to the pope. A shared feature in this exchange of views was the discussion about the divine character of princely power and how a righteous Christian form of government should be practised. The positions of both the prince and the church had been considerably strengthened, partly as a consequence of the expanded use of bureaucratic power. At the same time the aristocracy had also become increasingly self-aware and had acquired new rational means by which they could demand a place in the government of the kingdom. In Denmark members of the Skjalm group attained the most prominent positions in the leadership of the country. The archbishop, the chancellor, and the top military commanders belonged to this network. A similar situation prevailed in Sweden in that the Folkungar controlled the office of jarl, while their representatives simultaneously occupied clerical and juridical posts. Up until the end of the twelfth century the Norwegian kings and pretenders were almost entirely in the hands of different factions of magnates.

The church in no way represented a common stance in the political debate, since even the princely courts were sacred centres that could work in either collaboration or confrontation with the pope. During the twelfth century kings and dukes increasingly began to enlist the aid of prelates and clerics in their exercise of power. This meant that these men were indebted to the princes for their positions, so it was in their interest to plead for a strong princely power.

¹⁸⁴ O. Gierke, 1987 (1st ed. 1900), p. 30.

Through time the growing dominance of the church and the crown led to a transition from a traditional type of lordship, mainly based on personal bonds, to a form of government grounded on institutional exercise of power. This development is generally called “the process of state formation”. These were revolutionary changes that affected every stratum of society. The new government therefore had to be rooted at all levels in society so that it would function. This form of government differed in several respects from traditional perceptions of how power and politics should be exercised. Its representatives were consequently forced to apply new strategies of legitimation if the subjects were to understand that the new order was justified.

The kings’ strategies mostly sought to strengthen their own charisma by applying a Christian ideology which proclaimed that they had acquired their power from God. They could thus defend the new hierarchy in the name of something higher than themselves. The kings thereby created opportunities to present themselves as divine patrons who promised their subjects, in exchange for their loyalty to the sacrosanct power, to defend them from enemies of the sacred order. A further element in the ambition to bestow special charisma on royal power was to ascribe this power to tradition. This idea was put forward in the name of inherited royal rights. These could be legitimized in the right of a specific family to the throne, having been chosen by God. A strategy that became increasingly popular during the twelfth century was that the royal dynasties endeavoured to have their representatives canonized. Saints were regarded as close friends of God, which meant that the descendants of royal saints could put force behind their claims to act as spiritual patrons.¹⁸⁵ Through this strategy they aimed to alienate themselves from the personal protector relations of traditional society, while simultaneously wishing to give their own family an exclusive charisma that outshone the other families in the elite of the kingdom.¹⁸⁶ In addition to the Christian ideology, the princes also

185 Patron-client relations in the Sicilian mafia, according to Jeremy Boissevain, followed a Catholic religious model. In the saints’ cult you have to contact your patron saint to prevail on him or her to get God to listen to your prayers. J. Boissevain, 1966, pp. 30 f. Images of saints play a prominent role in the mafia’s initiation rites. When a new member swears the oath of loyalty, first his blood is smeared on a saint’s image. He then swears the oath and the image is burnt. This ritual probably derives from the freemasons. J. Dickie, 2004, pp. 12, 35–37; R. Saviano, 2017 (first publ. 2006), pp. 226. On the symbolic role of blood for trust, reciprocity, vengeance, conflict resolution, and social relations, see A. Blok, 2001, pp. 87–114.

186 An important strategy associated with tradition was to clarify one’s relationship to and descent from earlier princely families. One example is the Ottonians, who claimed descent from Charlemagne.

used rational means, with written laws and divinely sanctioned threats of punishment as examples of how the ideology was implemented in practice.¹⁸⁷

3.1 *Royal Diplomas and the Sacred Order*

It was thus in the interest of the king to create a collective solidarity in which the people professed their affiliation to the divinely instituted hierarchy. Kings thus became keen advocates of spreading Christian faith in all strata of the population. By every means available, the kings supported the expansion of the ecclesiastical organization. One of the chief instruments for creating a collective was to use the Christian ideology of friendship in communication with the people. The opening phrases of royal diplomas (*intitulationes* and *inscriptiones*) reveal how the princes viewed themselves and their subordinates.¹⁸⁸ The kings often titled themselves as *rex Dei gracia*, king by the grace of God, and they regarded their realms as images of the divine order in heaven. This was maintained through love and friendship, and therefore the same should prevail on earth. Devout believers within the kingdom were united through the idea of Christian brotherhood, and this collective was protected by their patron and friend, the king.¹⁸⁹

In a number of diplomas from the latter part of the twelfth century the Swedish king Knut Eriksson uses the formula "Through God's grace king over Svear and Götar", *dei gracia Rex sweorum atque gotthorum*.¹⁹⁰ The opening phrase thus shows how he professes his humility before God and the eternal kingdom of heaven. One document begins with the formula: "I, Knut, king of the Swedes, pray to and praise Christ, king, ruler, and governor of the angels

187 The explanatory model based on how authority is legitimized through charisma, tradition, and rational means comes from Max Weber's *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, M. Weber, 1978 (1922), pp. 212–254. See also Antonio Gramsci's theory that the governing class establishes and maintains hegemony in a society by creating ideological and societal consensus. A. Gramsci, 1992 (1948–51). Another interesting perspective is Roland Barthes' theory of myth, according to which a dominant group in society represents a communication system intended to present cultural norms and general collective understanding as given facts. R. Barthes, 1970 (1st ed. 1969). See also Pierre Bourdieu's use of the concept of *doxa*. He examines how different imprinting processes result in perceptions that take the social order for granted. P. Bourdieu, 1984 (1st ed. 1980), pp. 470 f. See also discussions of the concept of *doxa* in S. Bagge, 2000, p. 39, and D. Brégaint, 2009, pp. 55–86.

188 *Intitulatio* = the senders name and title. *Inscriptio* = the naming of the recipient.

189 Geoffrey of Monmouth (d. 1154) legitimizes English kingship by stressing that unity among English subjects was preserved through brotherly love and belief in Christ. Geoffrey of Monmouth, p. 438.

190 DS/1: 63, 65. Only *rex sweorum* in 67, 68, 70, 113. "Svear" = the people north of the Tiveden forest. "Götar" = the people south of Tiveden.

and of all realms; and honour the ineffable greatness of his power".¹⁹¹ The charter proclaims an exchange of land between Knut Eriksson and "the monks who formerly lived in Viby" (near Sigtuna). Moreover, the king is pleased that he has also been incorporated in their brotherhood (*fraternam societatem*) and that

I take part in prayer and am a holy servant, and I present myself as the servant of Christ and also their [the brothers'] protector, founder, and defender (*patronum, fundatorem, defensorem*).¹⁹²

The charter was witnessed by, among others, Archbishop Stefan, Jarl Birger Brosa, along with a number of named magnates and "very many of the nobles of the country" (*et plurimi nobiles terre*). The document thus illustrates not just a divine hierarchy sanctioned by the country's elite but also how the king acted as patron of the brothers' monastery. This meant that he was admitted to their brotherhood and included in their prayers. In some diplomas he also describes himself as the friendly bringer of peace, which shows that he regarded himself as patron and protector of the entire kingdom.¹⁹³

Yet it was not only the Swedish king who used the formula *Dei gracia*. Second place in the hierarchy was occupied by the jarl, Birger Brosa. In one charter he greets "lawman A" and "God's other friends" in Värmland with his amicable good wishes.¹⁹⁴ The charter shows how the jarl viewed his subjects as God's friends, who belonged to a larger collective Christian community. The king used a similar form of address. Knut Eriksson begins one of his letters of protection to the monks of Viby with the salutation *Kanutus dei gratia sweorum rex atque gothorum omnibus amicis suis salutem*, that is, the king greets all his friends in the collective consisting of the kingdom of the Svear and Götar.¹⁹⁵ The majority of the written communication between the king/jarl and the people, represented by the magnates and the peasantry, was thus permeated by ideological Christian rhetoric. In this discourse, based on an imagined community, collective friendship is the link between the ruler and his people. This bond was above all other secular loyalties, which meant that it was considered a cornerstone of the divinely instituted kingdom.

The aim of the religious rhetoric in the royal charters was thus to elevate the king's decisions to a higher spiritual sphere, superior to other powers. The use

191 DS/1: 64.

192 DS/1: 64.

193 DS/1: 68, 70.

194 *B. Dei gracia dux sueorum. Legis latori. A. Ceterisque dei amicis in Wermlandia degentibus. Salutem & amiciciam*, DS/1:824.

195 DS/1: 63.

of writing meant that the king employed a terminology adapted to a universal norm system and a semiotic community. This ideology of lordship, confirmed in writing, was a political instrument whereby the prince's sacred charisma merged with his right to rule through tradition. The early Norwegian Law of Gulathing opens with the declaration that the king "should be our friend and we his and God friend to us all".¹⁹⁶ Written legislation was thus an expression of how the central government strove to translate the ideology into practice. The Danish kings Valdemar I and Knud VI believed that, as occupants of a sacred office, *officium/ministerium*, they had the right to act as sovereign lawmakers, while simultaneously upholding the "time-honoured laws" of the kingdom.¹⁹⁷ In the Nordic charters the kings acted as sacred judges, threatening the punishment of God for those who dared to defy their decisions.¹⁹⁸ One example is the Swedish king Johan Sverkersson, who warns in two diplomas from the start of the thirteenth century that those who try to annul his donations will suffer regal and divine retribution.¹⁹⁹

3.2 *The Intellectual Debate on the Origin of Power*

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the theocratic rulership ideology played an important part when the scholarly elite discussed the origin of power. The view that the king or emperor had received his power from God can be traced back to a collection of laws known as *Corpus iuris civilis*.²⁰⁰ This was started by the Emperor Justinian in 527 and it contains the first model of imperial rule sanctioned by Christianity. The source was frequently used by twelfth-century jurists and churchmen, but it was interpreted differently because it paints an ambiguous picture of the origin of power and the scope of the monarch's authority. *Corpus iuris* contains not only statutes about the power of the emperor coming from above; it also refers here and there to the *Lex regia* which asserts

196 H.J. Orning, 2008, p. 73.

197 N. Damsholt, 1970, pp. 86 ff. Written legislation, however, was generally regarded as an area shared by the king and the church. S. Bagge, 2010, pp. 195–206. In Sweden the lawmen played an active part in composing written laws, which shows that the aristocracy took part in legislation.

198 These threats (*poenae*) mostly occur at the end of the documents, *sanctio*.

199 DS/1: 181 (c. 1219), 185 (c. 1220). In the charter King Johan titles himself *dei gracia rex*. In DS/1: 185 he makes a donation to the nuns of Riseberga, giving them his estate in Svibo (Sveabodh) on Öland, which the jarl Birger Brosa and Sir Ulf (jarl) had previously held in fief from the king. Perhaps the threat of royal and divine retribution is aimed at descendants of Birger and Ulf who might claim ownership of the fief. This type of ritualized formula should also be compared with oath formulae considered in Chapter 3.

200 J. Canning, 1996, pp. 5 ff.

that the emperor receives his power from the people. This means that *Corpus iuris* could be used to put forward different political opinions.

Many circles in the clerical and secular aristocracy acknowledged that the king occupied an office instituted by God, but they rejected the view of the king's unrestricted sovereignty. Several thinkers advocated the idea of an agreement based on consensus between the people and the king. Manegold of Lautenbach claimed in a book written in 1085 (in the midst of the Investiture Controversy) that the king was appointed by the people to be responsible for good government. Like a swineherd, he was supposed to protect his pigs against beasts of prey.²⁰¹ The consent of the people, *consensus populi*, was crucial for the king's position according to Manegold.²⁰² If he did not fulfil the duties incumbent on the office, he had broken his pact with the people, which meant that they were entitled to depose him. Manegold, however, can in no way be regarded as a representative of the "traditional right of the people". He primarily identified the term *populus* with the magnates of the Holy Roman Empire, and thus defended the right of the aristocracy to oppose the growing power of the emperor.²⁰³ Continuity can thus be detected between Manegold's princely ideal and the Carolingian king who reigned in amicable collaboration with the aristocracy. In Scandinavia during the High Middle Ages there were also people in the intellectual elite who championed the rights of the aristocracy in relation to high-handed rulers. This attitude can be seen, for instance, in Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*.²⁰⁴

The idea of a *rex iustus* who worked for "the general good" on the basis of a reciprocal pact of friendship between the king and the people had a great impact during the twelfth century among the learned ecclesiastical and the secular elite. It was thus not just a royal ideology but also an aristocratic political theory. Through time the Carolingian idea of impersonal kingship was also developed. It consisted of three separate units: the office of king, *officium*; the realm, *regnum*; and the people, *populus*.²⁰⁵ This disseminated the view of a fundamental social order constituting a kind of primordial state of affairs.

The organic metaphor that likened the kingdom to a body consisting of several parts, such as the head, the arms, and the legs was a symbolic expression of this state of affairs, resting on a fixed hierarchy which was in harmony and

201 J.B. Morrall, 1958, p. 38.

202 O. Gierke, 1987 (1st ed. 1900), p. 38.

203 I.S. Robinson, 1978, p. 128.

204 K. Johannesson, 1978; B. Sawyer, 1985, pp. 685–705; L. Hermanson, 2000. Similar tendencies can also be found in the fourteenth-century Swedish source *Erikskrönikan*.

205 In German research the term *transpersonal* is used to designate "impersonal kingship". J. Canning, 1996, pp. 64 f.

balance when the limbs worked together. No part could act independently without the cooperation of the others. The metaphor was used in different contexts, by church dignitaries, by spokesmen of the king, and by representatives of the secular aristocracy. In England it was used by John of Salisbury to demonstrate the king's dependence on the church. Saxo Grammaticus enlisted the symbolism when he wanted to show that the king was dependent on the people and the magnates, while the authors of *Sverris saga*, *A Speech against the Bishops*, and the Danish *Lex Castrensis* instead used the metaphor in propaganda for the sovereignty of royal power.²⁰⁶

The idea of an impersonal kingship as a union of three distinct entities differed radically from traditional kingship, which typically had a dynamic power structure that was constantly changing because it was based on social networks and temporary rights to a monopoly of force. Here the king was a socio-political key person, and the kingdom was also identical with his person. When he died, the power structure had to be built up again by forging new pacts of friendship and confirming old ones. The bond of friendship, however, had an important part to play as an element constituting society in the impersonal kingship as well. The whole could only last if there was a mutual relationship of love and friendship between the monarch and the other components of the realm: the church and the people.

According to medieval thinkers such as John of Salisbury, Brunetto Latini, and Thomas Aquinas, the prince should love his subjects.²⁰⁷ If he did not practise righteous government for the general good (*utilitas publica, bonum*

206 *Anecdota Sverreri: A Speech against the Bishops, Appendix II in Sverris saga; Lex Castrensis*. The latter declares that the king's hirdmen must be prepared to "obey the king's order, as the limbs are subordinate to the head". Svend Aggesen, *Lex Castrensis*, 3-33 f. The king is not infallible in *Lex Castrensis*, however. The law tells how Canute the Great, under "the influence of Satan", killed one of his own hirdmen. Here we see the organic simile stating that the Devil's influence caused the head to be infected with "corrupting poison" (*Aconitum*) which spread to the other limbs in the body. Svend Aggesen, *Lex Castrensis*, 10. 38.

207 John of Salisbury asserted that a *rex iustus* must uphold the law. The members of the government, however, had a duty deriving from justice itself: criticizing, reprimanding, and if necessary deposing a tyrannical ruler. The author thus represents a spiritual hierarchy as an ideal with an obligation, which also meant collective government. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, preface, C.J. Nederman, p. xxv. The good of the people, according to John of Salisbury, must always come before loyalty to kindred and friends. Lordship should not be based on blood ties but on merit. This outlook resembles the traditional view where the king was reckoned as the best among his equals because of his personal qualifications. The author, however, represents a new political order in his view of the gift society. All forms of gifts are regarded in *Policraticus* as bribes (with the exception of spiritual donations). John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, book 3, Chapter 3, p. 33, book 4, Chapter 11, p. 58, 60, book 5, Chapter 15, pp. 97 f.

publicum, bonum commune) he was regarded as a *rex tyrannus* and should therefore be deposed. The establishment of the organic union rested on a harmony that was often expressed in terms associated with reciprocal social bonds such as *unio, communio, commune, amicitia, fraternitas*. Working for the general good was also an ideal that was equated with the Christian virtue of *caritas*, altruistic love.²⁰⁸

The doctrine stipulated that royal power was an office that could be employed for different purposes, not just to strengthen the monarchy but also to criticize kings who did not manage their office well. In Germany the ideology was used by opponents of the reigning emperor. In Norway the idea was primarily used to strengthen the king's position.²⁰⁹ The Christian ideology of lordship was thus not a uniform doctrine. We therefore cannot simplify the high medieval discourse on power by claiming that it contained an opposition between a traditional form of government representing "the people's monarchy" and kingship by the grace of God. There were differing interpretations of the position of a *rex iustus* and the basis of his power. In royal propaganda the king could only be judged by God, whereas the clerical and secular aristocracy emphasized his dependence on the church or the people. In Scandinavia the royal agitation was trumpeted out in works like the Norwegian *A Speech against the Bishops*, while Saxo Grammaticus at the same time represented a clerical and a secular aristocratic outlook.²¹⁰

The significance of the bond of friendship as a sign of righteous government was reflected in the interaction between ideology and practice. One example is seen in diplomas where the kings title themselves *rex Dei gracia* and then go on to address their subjects as their friends or "God's friends". Another example is the supplications and rituals of pardon where the submission of the magnates or the free men is transformed into friendship. The twelfth-century Christian ideology of lordship represented a new hierarchical order, but the princes were forced to adapt this to the norms and values that traditional society associated with just government.

208 A. Black, 1988, p. 596; C.J. Nederman & K. Langdon Forhan, 1993, pp. 28 ff., 73.

209 S. Bagge, 2010, pp. 157–170.

210 In *A Speech against the Bishops* (*En tale mot biskopene*), opposition to the rightful king is an expression of arrogance (*dramb/superbia*). S. Bagge, 2010, p. 160. *Gesta Danorum* emphasizes instead the *superbia* of self-willed kings. L. Hermanson, 2000, p. 215. Sverre Bagge argues that Snorri's *Heimskringla* shows traces of the *rex iustus* ideology, especially when the author portrays St Olav, but that the work otherwise represents a traditional view of kingship. S. Bagge, 1991, pp. 68 ff., 158 ff. (cf. B. Sawyer, 2008, p. 52). The probable explanation is that Snorri was dependent on earlier hagiographic sources in his description of St Olav.

To be able to legitimize the new lordship, the kings consequently had to master the art of communicating with their subjects. Hans Jacob Orning argues that personal bonds such as kinship and friendship were in principle incompatible with the new hierarchical government represented, for instance, by the Norwegian king Håkon Håkonsson (1217–1263). With the *rex iustus* ideology the king is said to have acquired an instrument that he could use to “raise himself above and attack personal attachments”.²¹¹ He was thus forced to weaken these attachments since they were a threat to his superior position in society.

We must simultaneously bear in mind that friendship was an important part of the *rex iustus* ideology that was frequently employed in communication with the subjects. The idea of reciprocity lived on, but it was recast in a new Christian mould where friendship was not primarily a personal bond but a collective spiritual ideal. When the Swedish jarl Birger Brosa presented himself as both lord and friend in his salutation to the people of Värmland, this can be interpreted as an example of how Christian friendship was used for political purposes. The jarl occupied his superior position by divine right, but he and his subjects were simultaneously part of a broader spiritual community. Friendship was consequently an important structuring element in society even under the new form of government, but with the important difference that it was a spiritual bond within a sacral hierarchy where the king strove to distance himself from the reciprocal obligations of secular bonds.

3.3 *God's Friends and Satan's Henchmen – The Dualistic Conflict Perspective*

According to the spiritual dualistic outlook, the fatherland, *patria*, was supposed to be a reflection of the kingdom of heaven. The king by the grace of God (*gratia Dei rex*) therefore had to wage a constant struggle, together with his loyal subjects, God's friends (*amici Dei*), against the forces of evil. Because the king was God's proxy on earth, his enemies were also the enemies of God, who had to be combated with the sword.

Parallel to this struggle, the men of the church also waged spiritual strife against the Devil. Orderic Vitalis describes the Norman monasteries as bastions protecting the duchy from the forces of Satan.²¹² Monasteries in Scandinavia were probably likewise regarded as heaven's bastions where the monks and nuns, in exchange for pious donations from kings and lords, combated the

²¹¹ H.J. Orning, 2008, pp. 341–342.

²¹² B.P. McGuire, 2000, p. 73.

forces of evil with prayer as a weapon.²¹³ In Ailnoth's legend of Knud the Holy (written c. 1111/12) the ruling king, Niels Svendsen (r. 1104–1134), is portrayed as God's representative on earth. His kingdom, however, is constantly threatened by the Devil's henchmen, but Ailnoth proclaims that the ruler, with power from God, will fight his enemies and that the sacred covenant between the Lord and the Danish prince will cause his opponent's armies to fall.²¹⁴

The Norwegian king Magnus the Blind, according to Snorri, had the holy cross carried in front of him at the Battle of Färlev.²¹⁵ With this the king probably wanted to demonstrate that he represented true Christian kingship in the struggle against the powers of evil in the shape of Harald Gille's forces. God's friends, the saints, played an important part in conflicts and hostilities. When King Sverre wants to instil courage in his men's breasts before they engage in battle, he stresses time and again that they have God and the saints on their side. Before the Battle of Nordnes (1181) he promises his men the victory and asks them to stand firm against their "enemies":

I am persuaded that we shall win a victory over them, and you have seldom found my predictions falsified. Now as heretofore our strength lies entirely with God and His Saints, and not in our numbers. And I make now my request to God, to King Olaf the Saint, and to saint Sunnifa, and I pray that this encounter between us, King Magnus and myself, may end according as our claims are known by God to be sound.²¹⁶

When Sverre was going to name his new longship he dedicated it to the holy Virgin Mary and called it *Maríasúðin*. In order to obtain the saint's blessing for the ship, he gave precious gifts to Mary, including an archbishop's vestments. The king thereby hoped that the saint would accept his gifts and in return protect the ship and its crew. He therefore had relics built into its stem and stern.²¹⁷ Sverre interprets all victories on the battlefield as triumphs for true

213 Towns like Kungahälla and Schleswig, outposts of the Norwegian and the Danish realm respectively, had a special symbolic meaning in relation to the outside world. Sigurd the Crusader had a church built in Kungahälla where he preserved the most powerful and prestigious objects in his kingdom: a sliver of the true cross and a reliquary. The idea was probably that the relics would bring luck and prosperity to the town and defend the kingdom against the enemy. L. Hermanson, 2002, pp. 54, 56. A. Christophersen, 2001, pp. 199–210.

214 VSD: *S. Canutus rex*, Chapter 2. p. 78.

215 *Heimskringla*. XIII.3.

216 *Sverris saga*, 52.67–68.

217 *Sverris saga*, 80.101. Sverre is said to have given the chasuble to St Mary's Church, the cantor's cowl to Elgeseter and "and all the other robes to Nunnusetr".

Christian kingship. After the Battle of Fimreite (1184) the author of *Sverris saga* states that the king broke into *Kyrie eleison* to praise the victory over Magnus Erlingsson, and all his warriors joined in the singing.²¹⁸

Peace, *pax*, was often equated in the medieval sources with the term *amicitia*. This condition was achieved with the help of the sword by defeating the tools of the Devil, whether these were rival Christian pretenders to the throne or heathen infidels. The “princes of peace” thus achieved their goal through legitimate warfare. The royal propaganda that used the Christian rulership ideology left no room for negotiation. In traditional society *pax/amicitia* had been synonymous with an agreement attained after a long process of negotiations involving many actors and mediators. The Christian ideology, however, did not accept any compromises intended to achieve equilibrium between two parties. Instead it proclaimed the ideal of the mild prince of peace who pardoned his enemies on condition they submitted to his power. This ideal is evident, for example, in *Sverris saga*.

The element of Christian royal propaganda varies greatly in the Nordic source material, however. In Saxo Grammaticus’ *Gesta Danorum* the twelfth-century struggles for the Danish throne are rarely portrayed as a battle between God’s friends and Satan’s henchmen.²¹⁹ The few passages that are coloured by this polarization should be interpreted as expressions of the author’s dependence on earlier sources such as the *Roskilde Chronicle* and the *Legend of Knud Lavard*. On the other hand, the use of contrast is striking when he describes the struggle of the Danes against the pagans, which is a consequence of the author’s invocation here of classical crusading rhetoric. Occasionally Saxo portrays Valdemar I as a mild prince of peace who pardons enemies and makes them his friends. The author, however, is sometimes sceptical of this tactic, hinting that it would be better if the king had his adversaries executed to get rid of them once and for all.²²⁰

One aim of the dualistic conflict perspective in the Christian ideology of lordship, where secular battles are described as also being spiritual contests, may have been to elevate the conflicts above the level of the feud. The rules of the feud meant that warriors could retain their honour even if they abandoned a commander who failed to gain any victories and joined the opposing side instead. Several examples of such changes of loyalty can be found in the Icelandic sagas, in *Heimskringla*, and in *Gesta Danorum*. By making active use of Christian propaganda, as King Sverre does, claiming that the leader is fighting

218 *Sverris saga*, 93.117.

219 Nor is this the case in Snorri’s *Heimskringla* or in *Morkinskinna*.

220 L. Hermanson, 2000, p. 232, n. 119.

God's cause, the intention was to prevent men from changing sides or making private compromises with the enemy.

It was consequently important to create a strong collective loyalty where personal liaisons and internal feuds were subordinate to the cause of God's chosen king. This is also striking in the royal and ecclesiastical legislation which, in accordance with the ideal of the *rex iustus*, proclaimed that no consideration should be shown to ties of kinship or friendship. In the Christian rulership ideology, then, friendship was not equated with horizontal ties and social networks but with sacred vertical bonds in the form of loyalty to the king.

4 Group Culture and Collective Friendship

The question then is how the Nordic kings went about implementing the Christian ideology of lordship in practice. Was spiritual collective friendship just something that was practised within the walls of the monasteries, and otherwise chiefly regarded as a theoretical project of the men who wrote the royal propaganda? If it was to be possible for the king to legitimize and establish support for the new hierarchical government, it was essential for the ruler to be able to communicate with his subjects. He therefore had to find meaningful bonds that appealed to their ideals, norms, values, and political culture.

In this connection it is important to try to obtain some picture of how medieval people viewed themselves as belonging to larger communities and how they practised different forms of collective organization. We may assume that "national" awareness was only rudimentary. People in Denmark probably did not regard themselves as a "people" subject to the king of their realm. The term *patria* that occurs so often in the sources, generally translated as "fatherland" or "native country", may not have had any deeper meaning for the majority of people. It was merely a constructed term, known to a small group of scholars. For the country's ruling warrior elite the term chiefly had a universal Christian symbolic meaning in that they considered themselves to be the defenders of Christianity.²²¹ Our perception of a society comprising a specific demarcated

²²¹ K.V. Jensen 2004, pp. 268 f. According to Sverrir Jakobsson, the word *patria* was used in the twelfth century chiefly as a regional term for different judicial districts. The twelfth-century Norwegian source *Historia Norwegiae*, for example, enumerates eight different *patriae* in Norway, such as Viken, Trondheim, etc. S. Jakobsson, 1999, pp. 93, 99 ff. Saxo's *patria* is probably an intellectual construction based on a combination of classical Ciceronian thought and medieval political and theological ideas. On Saxo's use of the terms *patria* and *natio*, see K.H. Andersen, 2012, pp. 215–240.

territory with one nation and one people, governed by one political authority, did not exist among the broad medieval masses. Instead a pluralistic societal organization prevailed.

Medieval people belonged to a group culture where a person identified with different communities depending on the context. This could be the family, the household, the kindred, the village, the ship crew, various fraternities or alliance systems. It was these collective, not some overall authority, that provided social, economic, and legal security. The organization of major enterprises, such as military campaigns, usually occurred in bottom-up fashion, as different war bands voluntarily joined a commander. In territorial respects, it was probably local, or to a certain extent regional, identities, that mattered most.

“The people” was thus not an unorganized mass. Yet this has often been ignored in earlier research, where almost all forms of organization have been derived from one centre: the king or the church. This traditional analysis of power essentially proceeds from a bureaucratic model where the aim is to expose hierarchical administrative systems by searching for “traces of the king’s men”.²²² These scholars have applied a top-down perspective, aiming to find the core of sovereignty. In the introduction to this Chapter I observed that research in recent years has increasingly begun to notice the difference between *ruling* and *governing* – between *lordship* and *government*.²²³ According to this outlook, the king’s main function in traditional society was to find an existing pluralistic organization. Direct royal government based on a centralized administration was not realized in Scandinavia until the end of the thirteenth century.²²⁴

An important part of medieval group culture was the fraternity or guild. These organizations were prevalent in different strata of society, as associations of merchants, farmers, and warriors. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries the guilds developed to become spiritual groupings which identified themselves as integral parts of the universal Christian community. Like the monastic brotherhoods, the members of a guild used the terminology of kinship, calling each other brothers or sisters. The guilds were thus ritual communities

222 A great deal of effort has been expended to detect and map such systems; for example, *Uppsala öd* in Sweden. *Husaby* sites, royal estates, and the mention of specific titles on runic stones have been associated with the birth of a hierarchical organization of royal government and thus the first light in the tunnel. See e.g. M. Hagerman, 1996; M.G. Larsson, 2004.

223 Similar views were expressed by Otto Brunner in the 1930s and 1940s. O. Brunner, 1939. On lordship see e.g. T.N. Bisson, 1995, pp. 743–759; R. Barton, 2004, pp. 75, 144.

224 Here, of course, there is a difference in degree. For Sweden we could draw the conclusion that no such organization became a reality until the latter part of the sixteenth century.

bound together by fictive kinship ties, simultaneously hailing collective spiritual friendship as an ideal.

We shall now turn to discuss how the king related to this culture and the role played by friendship in it. Earlier research has chiefly busied itself with the economic and religious work of the guilds. Yet it has seldom been analysed from a power perspective that proceeds from the interaction of the brotherhoods with the powers above them. Valdemarian Denmark will serve as an example of how the kings tried to translate the Christian ideology of lordship into practice by grounding it in the group culture of the oath-taking society. The thesis is that collective friendship was not solely associated with the ecclesiastical and monastic sphere. This idea was also widespread in the guilds. This meant that the king could find in guild culture the meaningful bonds required to ensure collective backing for Christian lordship. These bonds were directly related to the individual's faith and social situation. The guilds will therefore be interpreted as an example of the interaction between the ideology of lordship and the exercise of power in practice. This means, by extension, that the guilds cannot be interpreted solely as a social phenomenon resting on horizontal bonds.

4.1 *The Ideals, Structure, and Function of the Guilds*

Research has shown that guilds and brotherhoods cannot be distinguished from each other, as they are often used synonymously in the sources.²²⁵ A great many Latin terms were employed to designate these communities: *fraternitas*, *confratria*, *societas*, *consortium*, *collegium*, *universitas*, *gilda*, *adunatio*, *coniuratio*, and *amicitia*. No systematic categorization is possible. One characteristic feature, however, is that the sources use the terminology of kinship and friendship when talking about the mutual relations of the guild members. They called themselves brothers, *confratres*, and they often called their associations brotherhoods, *confratriae*. These rested on a partnership, *communio*, that members joined by taking an oath. The word *commune* is associated with the Christian community that formed around the sacrament of the eucharist.²²⁶ The term *amicitia* was not infrequently used to denote the sworn collective, and its judicial rules were sometimes called "the laws of friendship".²²⁷ The terminology was thus impregnated with the idea of brotherhood and the ideal

225 O.G. Oexle, 1979, pp. 203–226; 1990, pp. 15 ff.; L. Bisgaard, 2001, 27 f. The view that the medieval cities had two kinds of guilds, one for the merchants and one for craftsmen, has also been abandoned in modern research on the topic. L. Bisgaard, 2001, pp. 21 f.

226 A. Black, 1992, p. 120.

227 W. Wilda, 1831, pp. 124, 149, 255; E. Coornaert, 1947, pp. 34, 237; M. Bloch, 1971b (1st ed. 1939), p. 417.

of solidarity in collective friendship, and so the guilds can be regarded as a kind of ideal Christian societies in miniature.

In Chapter 1 we encountered these moral doctrines that held up friendship, equality, and partnership for mutual assistance. The phenomenon of brotherhood thus has a long tradition that can be traced back all the way to the learned Pythagorean societies. In the Middle Ages these dogmas were transferred to a Christian context. The fraternities can be viewed as expressions of how they were applied in practice in everyday economic, political, and religious contexts. These associations are thus an example of the active practice of Christianity that pervaded the whole social organization in the Middle Ages. In modern research on guilds, historians have increasingly abandoned the view that guilds were mainly associated with commercial corporations. They were total social phenomena which could be found in all spheres of medieval society, everything from the aristocratic armed fraternities to the farmers' village guilds.²²⁸ The meaning of the terms guild or brotherhood has also varied over time, place, and context. This means that the functions of the guilds in the eleventh and twelfth centuries need not have been the same as in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries.

Several scholars today stress that the common denominator of guilds in the High Middle Ages was their religious function, in that they were regarded as manifestations of the divine order in heaven.²²⁹ We shall look more closely below at how this ideology was expressed. What should be emphasized is that friendship and Christian love (*caritas*) made up the foundation of the guilds' ideology and organization. This fact, however, has only received limited attention in Nordic research on friendship. Perhaps the explanation is that several historians view the guilds as representing fictive kin groups. They could thus be interpreted as a kind of counter to groups of friends. Another explanation is that they are still viewed in large measure as economic interest communities glued together by companionship.²³⁰ When it comes to research on the Scandinavian guilds, the main focus is on the trade corporations of the High Middle Ages.²³¹

228 M. Bloch, 1971a (1st ed. 1939), pp. 132 f.; A. Black, 1984; P. Reinholdsson, 1993; K. Ellefsrud, 1996; K.V. Jensen, 2002; H. Haugland, 2006.

229 A. Black, 1984, 1992; L. Little, 1988; O.G. Oexle, 1990; M. Rubin, 1993; C. Anz, 1998; L. Bisgaard, 2001.

230 According to Lars Bisgaard, the guilds have mainly been analysed by legal historians and economic historians for whom "the religious aspect has merely been an appendage". L. Bisgaard, 2001, p. 14.

231 This can partly be explained as a consequence of the availability of source material. For Nordic research on guilds in the late medieval and early modern periods see e.g. for Denmark, L. Bisgaard, 2001, for Norway H. Haugland, 2006, for Sweden D. Lindström, 1991.

In medieval society the brotherhoods were an important organization alongside the traditional units, the family, the kin, and the household. They were thus communities that were not dependent on blood ties. Some scholars think that the guilds represented an alternative to vertical bonds of feudal relations of protection. Their message of Christian love, according to Antony Black, had its roots in the tenth-century God's Peace movement. Originally the guilds represented an endeavour to end the constant vendettas.²³² It might thus seem natural to interpret the guild culture as a counter to the ideology of violence in the feuding society. Yet this interpretation does not stand up to closer scrutiny.

Several sources show that the fraternities participated actively in feuds, for example, by demanding blood vengeance if a brother had been killed. Knut Ellefsrud has shown that almost all Norwegian, Danish, and Anglo-Saxon guild statutes in the Early and High Middle Ages stipulate the duty of avenging a brother.²³³ In conflicts with individuals or groups outside one's own community, the members thus appear to have followed the rule of the feud. The ordinances of the London guild from the tenth century stipulate, for example, that: "For friendship as well as for vengeance we shall remain united, come what may".²³⁴ The duty to take revenge and the right to pursue feuds are also prominent in the statutes of the Cambridge guild from the start of the eleventh century. Ellefsrud points out that Cambridge was a part of the old Danelaw, and around 1000 the area was still under the influence of Scandinavian judicial practice.²³⁵

The guilds were thus part of the political structure of the oath-taking society. In connection with the feuds that arose after the murder of Charles the Good, Galbert of Bruges repeatedly describes how groups of citizens swore collective oaths of friendship, fidelity, and loyalty to different lords. These do not differ noticeably from the oaths sworn between lords and vassals in the county.²³⁶ Another example is the sworn citizens of Schleswig, who participated actively

²³² A. Black, 1992, p. 120.

²³³ K. Ellefsrud, 1996, p. 69. Ellefsrud interprets the growth of the guilds as a consequence of the great need that had arisen for protection, as neither the crumbling "kin society" nor the still weak central government was able to guarantee peace and safety.

²³⁴ M. Bloch, 1971b (1st ed. 1939), p. 420; A. Black, 1984, pp. 4 f.

²³⁵ K. Ellefsrud, 1996, pp. 56 f. A law text from the reign of King Edmund (939–946) mentions problems arising from the growing number of feuds, said to be a consequence of the presence of Northmen in the country. K. Ellefsrud, 1996, p. 58.

²³⁶ Galbert, Chapters 20, 25, 27, 54, 55, 66, 94, 101, 103. Marc Bloch claims that doing *homagium* was at least as common between large groups as between individuals. M. Bloch, 1971a (1st ed. 1939), p. 130.

in the struggles for the Danish throne that broke out in 1131. After the murder of the lord protector of the town, Knud Lavard, the sworn confederation exacted revenge by killing the Danish king Niels Svendsen.²³⁷ The German priest Helmold calls Knud Lavard the *senior et defensor* of Schleswig, which was a common designation used in connection with the function of the lords as patrons. The guilds were thus often created in interaction with the princely power. A typical case is that of the inhabitants of the Flemish town of Aire-sur-la-Lys, who received from Count Robert II (count 1093–1111) a confirmation of their borough organization and its rules. They are said to have called this association an *amicitia*, and the members' main duty was to assist each other with mutual help "as if they were brothers".²³⁸

The guilds were thus seldom autonomous units pursuing "free enterprise", since they were dependent on the protection of their patrons if they were to be able to engage in their activity.²³⁹ The patrons, for their part, had an interest in establishing ties of dependence between themselves and the people, while simultaneously striving to have a share in the military and economic operations of the fraternities. If they were merchant organizations, the princes could control where trade was pursued and demand a share of the profit. If they were armed fraternities, the patrons could gain control over military organizations built up from below, and they could demand part of the booty from

237 The information can be found in the older *Sjælland Chronicle* (from around 1250). SM 11, pp. 33 f. The guild is said to have been a *hezlagh*, which can be interpreted as an "oath company". H.T. Gilkær, 1980, p. 146, n. 167; J.H. Lind, 2006, p. 143, n. 2. It should be noted, however, that the source was written long after the event took place. Christian Radtke believes that Schleswig had a sworn "company of burghers" or a "commune" alongside the guild brothers' personal association. C. Radtke, 2002, pp. 41 f., 48 ff. Sophus Bugge claims that the word *hezlagh* comes from *heit* meaning a solemn promise or a formal religious ceremony. S. Bugge, 1908, p. 197.

238 G. Koziol, 1992b, pp. 239 ff. The members of this *amicitia* were primarily occupied with ending feuds through mediation and reconciliation. Knut Ellefsrud asserts that the Nordic guilds played a very important part in conflict resolution in the medieval local community. K. Ellefsrud, 1996, pp. 46–101. Ellefsrud's study is chiefly based on Norwegian source material. This view is also espoused by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, who thinks that the role of the guilds in local conflict negotiations often overlapped the functions of the courts. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1999b, pp. 146 ff.

239 This picture has perhaps been primarily conjured up by historians in the early twentieth century who were influenced by the ideas of liberalism. Similar thoughts nevertheless survive in today's historiography. See e.g. E.S. Hunt & J.M. Murray, 1999. We should nevertheless note the differences between conditions in the High and Late Middle Ages, and that the role of the patrons varied depending on different forms of government such as city states and principalities.

martial expeditions.²⁴⁰ This exchange could take on a spiritual expression if the protected guilds made donations to a saint associated with the patron's kin. This created a community of religious interest between the patron and the subjects' group culture. Galbert of Bruges writes, for example, that the merchants of Bruges had been accustomed to doing their business "safely under the peace and protection of the most pious count". When they heard the news of the murder of Charles the Good, they packed up their wares and fled.²⁴¹ The burghers later played an active role, not just in exacting revenge for the murder but also in the process by which the count was proclaimed a martyr. The sanctification of Charles's dead body would mean that the city had a reliquary which was a potential honour for the clergy and the citizens alike.²⁴² The relics ultimately entailed lucrative opportunities for the merchants as the hallowed reputation of the place stimulated trade.

These mutual ties of dependence mean, by extension, that liaisons were also established between different strata in society. According to the Swedish historian Catharina Andersson, the donations by the brotherhoods gave them greater symbolic capital by being incorporated in the networks of the elite. This was particularly significant for people lower down in the social hierarchy because the fraternities were relatively heterogeneous socially.²⁴³ Andersson also says that the donations helped the donors to forge links with prominent dead members of the brotherhood, through which they could enhance their own status. As examples she mentions the brotherhood of Julita monastery, of which the Swedish king Knut Eriksson was a member. The ritual religious interaction between living and dead, between churchmen and laymen, between high and low, thus helped to create a Christian collective mentality that permeated almost all layers of society.

The guilds could thus constitute significant symbolic and social capital for a prince. With the aid of traditional patron-client relations he could acquire many supporters, but the number of clients was nevertheless limited. By

²⁴⁰ We should bear in mind, however, that in the Viking Age and the Early Middle Ages it is difficult to draw a sharp dividing line between merchants and warriors. Trading expeditions could easily become plundering raids (or vice versa) if circumstances were favourable.

²⁴¹ Galbert, Chapter 16, pp. 123–124.

²⁴² Galbert, Chapter 22, pp. 137–139.

²⁴³ C. Andersson, 2006, p. 379; C. Andersson, 2013, pp. 219–246. This king was also engaged, together with the jarl Birger Brosa, in the foundation of the monastery of the Order of St John in Eskilstuna. H. Bengtsson, 1999, p. 128; C. Andersson, 2006, p. 357. On the socially heterogeneous composition of the brotherhoods, see K. Esmark, 2002, p. 148. On the relationship between the living and the souls of the dead in medieval society, see P. Geary, 1994a.

forging similar bonds with different brotherhoods he was able to exercise control over local organizations in his own territory, forming extensive collectives of clients. To use Susan Reynolds' term, then, we can say that the guilds were a part of the multitude of "communities" in medieval society, but these were important components of a hierarchical power structure.²⁴⁴

4.2 *Brotherhood and Continuity*

The specific feature of guilds is today considered to be their religious focus, and several historians have interpreted them as a phenomenon particularly belonging to the High and Late Middle Ages.²⁴⁵ Yet this view is based on a narrow definition of what a guild or brotherhood is. Other scholars have shown that it is very difficult to make such distinctions. There is thus some conceptual confusion between a broad definition of the term guild and a narrower one. Otto Gerhard Oexle is one of the leading advocates of a broader concept.²⁴⁶ In the following I proceed from a broad definition and I also stress the continuity in guild culture. Different types of brotherhood were probably important organizations in medieval society, in both pre-Christian and Christian times. Sworn guilds can be traced back at least as far as the Carolingian realm of the eighth century.²⁴⁷ In Scandinavia, because of the lack of written sources, there is no

244 S. Reynolds, 1984. Compare also the German research concept "Gruppen und Gemeinschaften". In Germany there has been *Gruppenforschung* ever since the mid twentieth century. The Freiburg School with scholars such as Gerd Tellenbach and Karl Schmid laid the foundation for this, and it is represented today by historians such as Gerd Althoff, Hagen Keller, and Otto Gerhard Oexle. See e.g. H. Keller, 1989; G. Althoff, 1990; O.G. Oexle, 1994.

245 L. Bisgaard, 2001, p. 20. Bisgaard refers to André Vauchez, who believes that guilds were spread over Europe in the thirteenth century in the wake of the Franciscans and the Dominicans. A. Vauchez, 1987, pp. 398 f. See also Christoph Anz, who claims that there was no special Nordic model of a guild in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. C. Anz, 1998, pp. 188, 235 ff.

246 O.G. Oexle, 1979. See also L. Bisgaard, 2001, pp. 15, 19 ff.

247 The word *guild* in the Germanic languages originally denoted a brotherhood of young warriors practising an ancestor cult. It was used of all groups who were united through ritual bonds and friendship, with the members pledging each other mutual assistance by paying an admission fee (*geld*). The oldest attested example of the term *gilda* is from around AD 450. It then referred to a sacrificial meal for the souls of the dead. G. Le Bras 1940–41, n. 316; A. Black, 1984, p. 3. The concern of the guild members for dead souls also occurs on the Swedish runic stones in Sigtuna, but there in a Christian context. The sacred feast, *convivium*, in the High Middle Ages was not just a feature of the guilds but also one of the prime friendship rituals. É. Coornaert, 1947, p. 31; G. Althoff, 1990, pp. 203–211; 1999, pp. 94 f. See also Chapter 3. Parallels can be drawn to the drinking companies of classical Greece and Rome (*collegia*, *corpora*, *sodalitia*). These were regarded as ritual families where friendship and figurative brotherhood replaced blood ties. A. Black, 1984, p. 3. For the debate about the origin of the Norwegian guilds see e.g. H. Haugland, 2006, pp. 20 ff.

evidence before the eleventh century, but in view of the vigorous contacts with the Franks, it seems likely that the Norse were part of a similar group culture even before this.

In Sweden inscriptions on runic stones are testimony that sworn brotherhoods may have been fundamental units in the military organizations.²⁴⁸ One example is the Bjälbo stone, dated to the early eleventh century, where the inscription reads: "Valiant men (*drengir*) raised this stone in memory of Greipr, their guild-brother (*kilta sin*). Lófi, Júti's son, carved these runes".²⁴⁹ The term *drengir* may indicate that this was a military brotherhood, since the title was often used for warriors.²⁵⁰ The same applies to the Törnevalla stone, which was raised "after Dreng, Öger's son, his guild-brother (*kilta sin*)".²⁵¹ The guild in Törnevalla is believed to have been Christian, since the ship masts depicted on the stone resemble Christian crosses.²⁵² The established opinion, however, is that both the Bjälbo and the Törnevalla stones concern trade guilds. The only argument put forward in favour of this is that the stones are located close to the medieval trading centre in Linköping.²⁵³

Inscriptions which can be more certainly associated with trading associations are found on two runic stones in Sigtuna. One of them states: "The Frisian guild-brothers (*frisa kiltar*) had this stone raised in memory of Þorir, their guild-brother. May God help his spirit. Þorbjörn carved".²⁵⁴ The runes on the other stone tell us that: "The Frisian guild-brothers carved these runes in memory of Albóð, Slóði's partner. May the holy Christ help his spirit. Þorbjörn carved".²⁵⁵

248 In Sweden there are four runic stones with the word for "guild": the Törnevalla stone and the Bjälbo stone in Östergötland and the two stones in Sigtuna.

249 Ög 64: www.kms.raa.se.

250 On the epithet *drengir* see C. Löfving, 1986, pp. 168 ff.; P. Sawyer, 1988, pp. 34–35, 56.

251 The stone is a new find. Here, however, the term *drengir* could also be a personal name. See S.B.F. Jansson, 1960, pp. 226 ff. At Ås in Västergötland there is a stone with the inscription: "Þorir raised this stone in memory of Karl, his partner (*frlaka*), a very good valiant man". Vg 112. Karl died in Hobro in Jutland on a journey to the west. In Hobro there is a stone raised to the same man.

252 S.B.F. Jansson, 1960, p. 236.

253 <http://www.kulturarvostergotland.se>. This argument does not appear very strong.

254 U 379.

255 U 391. Erik Brate refers to Adolf Schück and his claim that "the guild of the Frisians – by analogy with the guild of the Gotland travellers – consisted of men of Sigtuna who pursued trade in Frisia", www.runor.se/bra/bra63.htm. Slode was a common Old Swedish name, found on several runic stones. The name Albod is Frisian. Some scholars choose to interpret the term *felaha* to mean partnership in that the guild was a transnational network comprising both Frisians and Sigtuna men. See e.g. A. Gräslund, 2007, pp. 15 f. See also note 107 on the terms *hospites*/guest and guest-friendship. The epithet *félagi*, which is translated in *Svenskt Runordsregister* (SRR) as "bolagsman" (partner, associate) is found in different forms on six Swedish runic stones: Vg 182, U 391, Sö 292, U 954, Vg 122, Vg 112.

The Sigtuna stones, and possibly also the Törnevalla stone, thus show that there were Christian guilds in Scandinavia at the start of the eleventh century. Like the brotherhoods of the High Middle Ages, it seems that one of their most important functions was to ensure the salvation of dead guild members.²⁵⁶

Adolf Schück does not find it especially likely that the *drengir* in Bjälbo belonged to a trade guild. He would instead associate them with local district guilds or defensive guilds.²⁵⁷ Schück claims that the term “brother”, which is common on eleventh-century runic stones, may also have had the sense of “ideal brother” not always just a literal brother by blood.²⁵⁸ As arguments for this he cites a number of runic stones where the term is found alongside military titles like *sveinn* and *drengr*. The brothers mentioned on the Ingvar stones in the provinces around Lake Mälaren, for example, need not have been biological brothers according to Schück but could instead have been brothers in arms belonging to a defensive guild.

The Danish scholar John Lind has studied the occurrence of sworn brotherhoods in Viking Age and early medieval Scandinavia.²⁵⁹ For this purpose he has examined group designations such as *væringjar*, *rus*, *kylfingar*, and *birkarlar*. There has been lively debate about whether these terms originally denoted ethnic, functional, or socio-economic units. Lind points out, for instance, that the Old Norse word *væringjar* derives from the noun *vár*, meaning an oath or guarantee. This could be an indication that the term was originally used of a sworn fraternity.²⁶⁰ Lind also employs “the runestone list” as an umbrella term for the stones raised around Mälaren in memory of Ingvar’s expedition. These mention at least twenty-five different names of men who took part in a major expedition to the east in the middle of the eleventh century, under the leadership of Ingvar. Lind believes that the stones bear witness to the existence of a transregional network in the Mälaren region which can be viewed as an example of how major enterprises were organized during the Viking Age through an action-oriented group culture.²⁶¹ Names of collectives such as *væringjar*, *rus*,

The translation “bolagsman” is problematic, in my opinion, since the term today is so intimately associated with commercial activity. Perhaps a more neutral translation such as “companion” or “comrade” would be preferable. Otherwise there is a risk that we confine ourselves to modern mercantile interpretations of the term.

256 The spiritual purpose of the guilds can thus go back much further than scholars like A. Vauchez claim. It must have been very important to demonstrate Christian solidarity for travellers, as groups from different countries could find here a field where common rules applied.

257 A. Schück, 1952, p. 262.

258 A. Schück, 1952, p. 263.

259 J.H. Lind, 2006, pp. 143–157.

260 J.H. Lind, 2006, p. 149.

261 J.H. Lind, 2006, pp. 156 f.

kylfingar, and *birkarlar* may thus originally have been used to denote different military or commercial brotherhoods.²⁶²

The spread of Christianity in Scandinavia meant that the ideological focus of the guilds changed, but the basic premises for their organizational structure were presumably relatively unchanged over the centuries.²⁶³ These tenacious structures were only dissolved very slowly in pace with the development of a state control apparatus in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The main transformation of the brotherhoods in eleventh – and twelfth-century Scandinavia was that Christianity gave the phenomenon a spiritual character as the ritual element took on new expressions.

The interest shown by Scandinavian kings in guild activities can be traced back to the eleventh century. According to Snorri Sturluson, the Norwegian king Olav Kyrre (r. 1066–1093) founded the “Great Guild” (*Miklagildi*) in Nidaros, dedicated to Olav the Holy. Before this there were only drinking guilds in the town.²⁶⁴ The kings thus seem to have contributed actively to sacralize an existing guild culture. This was the start of a process of formalization and hierarchization by which fraternities were incorporated in the universal Christian order. This in turn meant that they became a part of kingship by the grace of God. A mainly pragmatic, action-related, bottom-up organization thus met an ideological, top-down hierarchical order. The question is how this process went about and what role friendship played in it. Valdemarian Denmark can serve here as an illustrative example.

5 Friendship, Brotherhood, and Power Systems in Valdemarian Denmark

After bloody fighting for the throne, Valdemar I became sole king in Denmark in 1157. Thus began the period that is traditionally known in Denmark as “the great age of the Valdemarians”.²⁶⁵ The reigns of Valdemar and his sons, Knud VI and Valdemar II, are thus intimately associated with the formation of the

262 On pre-Christian brotherhoods see Knut Ellefsrud, 1996, pp. 15 ff.; H. Haugland, 2006, pp. 20 ff.

263 Scholars such as Hans Planitz and Edith Ennen have claimed that the guilds had several features in common with various “Germanic” institutions: blood brotherhood, ancestor cult, and drinking company. H. Planitz, 1940; E. Ennen, 1953.

264 *Heimskringla*, X.2. Snorri goes on to write that the guild brothers had a stone church built there to St Margaret. Little research has been done on the role of the guilds in building churches and thus expanding the ecclesiastical organization in the Early and High Middle Ages in Scandinavia.

265 K. Erslev, 1898.

Danish nation. A necessary condition for the establishment of the hierarchical form of government by the Valdemarians, according to earlier research, was the subordination of the recalcitrant aristocracy and the willingness of the church to cooperate with the king.²⁶⁶ To what extent this development was mainly achieved by implementing institutional power and subjecting the aristocracy is nevertheless a matter of debate.

In the following the aim is not to study how the Danish kings founded a state apparatus through the exercise of centralized institutional power. Instead we shall look more closely at how the kings related to the group culture in society and the role played by brotherhoods in their relationship to the aristocracy. The discussion here will be based on the *Gotland Letter*, issued by Valdemar I in the 1170s, and the *Brotherhood List* from the 1190s. Neither of these sources mentions the word friendship, but they do reveal the king's interest in portraying himself as a member of a brotherhood. Let us begin with the first source.

5.1 *King Valdemar's Letter to the Gotland Travellers*

The *Gotland Letter* conveys interesting information, not just about how King Valdemar viewed himself and his relation to the subjects of the realm, but also how they were organized in various brotherhoods which sought the king's favour and protection. It is of course the view of the men in power that is expressed in the text, but the document can nevertheless shed light on the shared interests that had arisen between the king and local communities in the country. The letter therefore deserves to be quoted in its entirety.²⁶⁷

Valdemar, by the grace of God king of the Danes, to all those who travel to Gotland and who are subject to the jurisdiction of his royal majesty, grace and greetings.

It is a custom and practice among the whole people, but especially among the people who travel to different parts of the world for the sake of profit, that they improve their position through law and custom in areas where foreign protection does not offer them defence in their own strength. For this reason, we embrace with great favour the connection with your brotherhood and guild (*fraternitatis et societatis connexio*), which you have established by sound counsel and with most advantageous foresight in honour of the martyr St Knud, especially since it will be of highly fruitful benefit to us and to our successors and to the royal

²⁶⁶ For a research survey see e.g. L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 14–28.

²⁶⁷ The translation here is based on the Danish translation in *Danmarks riges breve* by H. Nielsen, C.A. Christensen & F. Blatt.

glory. But just as God, the governor of us all, has created different limbs under one head and has given them different fields of activity, he has determined in the same way, according to the changing conditions and times, what people should do. We are therefore obliged in fatherly love to give equal and balanced rights to everyone, whether they engage in trading or agriculture or shine with a military belt. Consequently we wish to be members of your brotherhood, which you have recently established, and we shall take part with our full authority in all that your acknowledged society may consent to. We therefore ask and command that you do not for any reason or as a consequence of protests or in dissent with any adversaries give up what you have commenced, namely, the construction of the house and the solemn inauguration of the guild at a set and suitable time. And thus when you, having heeded the advice from Otto, our chaplain and emissary, have promised to obey God and the laws, you shall stand fast with this. For as it is written in the gospels: Render to God the things that are God's and to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. Therefore, we instruct your community (*universitatis vester*) that the annual alms which come from the same brotherhood, either with you in Gotland or in all towns of our kingdom where the guild of the holy Canute is celebrated, shall be transferred to the place of this martyr by trusted men. The admission fee to the same guild shall be used for the construction of the guild brothers' house until it is completed. But we ratify the wording of this letter with our royal protection and confirmation, and establish it as unbreakable. God's and our eternal peace be with those who obey what is said above. Farewell in the Lord.²⁶⁸

Here we see an example of how tradition meets innovation. In the introduction to the letter the king observes that people have traditionally organized in various associations to give each other support and protection. People were especially vulnerable if they travelled to different corners of the earth "for the sake of profit". The king declares that it is the Gotland travellers' association (*societas*) itself that has taken the initiative to form a holy brotherhood (*fraternitas*) in honour of the martyr St Knud, that is Valdemar's father, Knud Lavard.²⁶⁹ As a consequence the king proclaims that they shall enjoy his favour

²⁶⁸ DR/3: 63, DD/3: 63.

²⁶⁹ Kurt Villads Jensen says that there are two different interpretations of the expression *fraternitatis et societatis connexio*. According to one of these, the text is about the establishment of "an alliance of brotherhood and fellowship". *Fraternitas* and *societas* could then be perceived as near synonyms. The other interpretation, which Jensen endorses, is that this means two different organizations. An existing organization (*societas*) of Gotland

and benevolence. The Gotland merchants' initiative, according to Valdemar, helps to enhance the king's glory. He then announces that the hierarchy of the Danish kingdom reflects the holy order in the kingdom of heaven. Here we see the organic metaphor that was typical of the times, as Valdemar claims that "just as God, the governor of us all", has created different limbs obeying one head, he has also given people different tasks in the world. The king's "fatherly love" (*paterno tenemur affectu*) is granted in the letter to all the secular social groups in the kingdom: those who set off on trading voyages, those who labour with the soil, and those who wear the shining belt of chivalry.

This is thus an indication that all these groups had experiences of organizing themselves in brotherhoods. Valdemar I then declares that he wants to be accepted as a member of the Guild of St Knud. One requirement if he is to acknowledge the brotherhood as a Guild of St Knud is that he himself shall participate actively in its regulation by approving its statutes. Also, the brothers must complete the construction of the house they have started and shall hold the solemn inauguration ritual of the guild at a set time.²⁷⁰

The king's admission to the brotherhood meant that the guilds were incorporated in the sacred order where Valdemar, as God's representative, saw it as his duty to fulfil his spiritual calling at the top of the hierarchy. The guilds' ceremonies were simultaneously connected to a Christian ritual where the saint-king was at the centre.²⁷¹ The participation of the clergy is shown in the letter in the person of the king's emissary, his *capellanus* Otto, who advises the guild members "to obey God and the laws". They have thereby also indirectly submitted to Christian kingship. The instituted order is legitimized by reference to the gospels: "Render to God the things that are God's and to Caesar the things that are Caesar's".²⁷²

There is then a command to the whole corporation (*universitas vester*), that is to say, to all the brotherhoods in the kingdom that celebrate St Knud, that they give alms annually to the martyr's resting place in Ringsted. The king thus wishes to centralize the entire gift system associated with the saint in one place in order to gain control, not just over the material resources but also

merchants has decided to enhance its status by creating a religious brotherhood (*fraternitas*) dedicated to St Knud. K.V. Jensen, 2002, pp. 73 f.

270 Jensen interprets the text to mean that the brothers' house in Ringsted is being built. K.V. Jensen, 2002, p. 75.

271 Knud Lavard was never king of Denmark, and therefore I choose to employ the term "saint-prince".

272 *The Holy Bible: New Testament*: Matt. 22, 21; Mark. 12, 17; Luke 20, 25.

over the sacred space.²⁷³ The *Gotland Letter* consequently shows that meaningful ideological bonds had been established between the secular power, the church, and the country's group culture, whose spiritual belief was utilized as a collective force in building the theocratic Valdemarian kingship.²⁷⁴

5.2 *The Brotherhood List and Medieval Group Culture*

The Gotland letter hints at the existence of a diverse guild culture comprising almost all social strata in Denmark. The *Brotherhood List*, or the *Brother List* as it is sometimes known, gives just a glimpse into how the country's aristocracy organized itself in brotherhoods. The source is incorporated in *King Valdemar's Cadastre* (*Kong Valdemars Jordebog*), which is believed to have been compiled at the start of the 1230s.²⁷⁵ The list names 215 people. These are divided into groups according to a topographical system based on *sysler*, roughly equivalent to counties, comprising the whole of Denmark, except Skåne. There is no doubt that these are members of the elite, since the list includes Valdemar I's son Knud VI, eight bishops (one of them a chancellor), three chamberlains, and a marshal.²⁷⁶

273 It is difficult to say how established this gift tradition was when the charter was issued. Knud Lavard's official canonization (1169) had been proclaimed just a year or two earlier. The cult, however, had begun to spread almost immediately after the death of the duke in 1131. It was initiated and cherished by kings such as Knud Lavard's half-brother, Erik Emune, and by Svend Grathe. Yet the cult need not have been solely a royal initiative. In Galbert of Bruges' chronicle the burghers and the clerics were a driving force in declaring Charles the Good as a martyr (see page 207). The burghers of Schleswig may have played a similar role.

274 The traditional interpretation of the *Gotland Letter* is strictly economic. The fundamental purpose of the letter was that Valdemar wanted to protect and share in the lucrative trade in the Baltic Sea. The Guild of Knud is interpreted as a merchant organization. L. Weibull, 1946, pp. 84–101; E. Hoffman, 1975, pp. 171 ff. Jensen, however, thinks that there is nothing in the letter to show that the Guilds of St Knud were *solely* trade corporations. Instead he had a broader ideological and social interpretation, emphasizing the differentiated social composition of the guilds and their function as associations for military protection. The most important purpose of the letter, according to Jensen, was that the king wanted to centralize the gift system associated with St Knud in Ringsted. K.V. Jensen, 2002, pp. 72 ff.

275 kvJb, Aakjær 1, pp. 84 ff.; 164 ff.; M. Venge, 2002, pp. 69–84. The so-called “main list” in the “cadastre” is explicitly dated 1231, and there is no reason for questioning that date. The other lists in the codex are of varying dates, some as late as the 1250s. The extant codex has on paleographical grounds usually been dated to around 1290, but the arguments for that date are not very strong, and the codex may well be two or three decades earlier. *King Valdemar's Cadastre* is preserved in a copy produced in Sorø abbey c.1300. M. Venge, 2002, p. 95.

276 T.E. Christiansen, 1966, p. 85.

The men are divided into small groups where they are titled with the epithet *fratres* – brothers. Each group has between two and eight brothers. The majority of the members probably lived during the reign of Knud VI (1182–1202), but names that can be associated with the reign of Valdemar II (1202–1241) are also listed. The king has no special position in these brotherhoods as he is merely named as one in a series of brothers. Can the list then be interpreted as a fragment reflecting a medieval Danish group culture? Here I will not only present a somewhat controversial hypothesis based on this assumption; I will also apply a power perspective to the phenomenon.

Valdemar the Great was the first Danish king who efficiently and systematically succeeded in using the Christian reform ideology in order to strengthen his position, in relation not just to rival royal descendants but also to the indigenous aristocracy and foreign princes. Besides the royal diplomas, the inscription on the leaden plaque that was buried with the King and the coins he minted during his reign demonstrate an image of a king who viewed himself as northern Europe's prime crusader king. It was chiefly against the background of his campaigns against the "infidel" Wends that he legitimized his position. The policy of the reform popes enhanced the holiness of the European princes at the expense of the special position of the emperor.²⁷⁷ By combining clerical and political ideals, Valdemar was able to bestow a special charisma on his branch of the family through the saint's cult of his father.

The Danish historian Kurt Villads Jensen does not interpret the Guild of St Knud as a merchants' organization. Given that Valdemar systematically strove to portray his father Knud Lavard as a crusader saint, he wished instead to declare the guild to be a Christian military brotherhood like the urban militias in the Iberian peninsula.²⁷⁸ Jensen draws attention to the striking similarities between the military rules of the *Lex Castrensis* and the statutes of the Guild of St Knud. He also thinks that the brothers in the *Brotherhood List* can probably be compared to the members of the Guild of St Knud. The source is then interpreted as a membership list of a religious brotherhood of warriors belonging to the elite, spiritually united under the patron saint, Knud Lavard, but simultaneously subject to the son and grandson of the martyr, Valdemar I and Knud VI respectively.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ H.T. Gilkær, 1980, p. 124.

²⁷⁸ K.V. Jensen, 2002, p. 71. That the Guilds of St Knud were primarily a protection organization has also been discussed by H.T. Gilkær, 1980, T. Nyberg, 1984, and C. Anz, 1998.

²⁷⁹ Jensen views the Guilds of St Knud as a crusading order built up around classical monastic ideals where the king had a central role as master of the order. A bearing argument for this interpretation is the fact that several of the brothers who can be identified can be associated with crusading activity. He stresses, however, that the source material is perhaps

Jensen thus sees the *Brotherhood List* and the Guild of St Knud as part of the king's exercise of power. I shall build on this controversial thesis by examining the source from the perspective of royal power, but I simultaneously want to explain the role of the aristocracy in the Valdemarian system of lordship. In this connection it is very important to ask to what extent the aristocracy can be said to have submitted to kingship by the grace of God. By studying the brotherhood as an expression of the interaction between king, clergy, and magnates, I claim that it was a reciprocal exchange rather than subordination. Here the collective spiritual friendship and the idea of brotherhood were the uniting bonds. I thus want to show that the twelfth-century centralization of power went through different phases, with control over the group culture as one of several important elements. The foundation of institutional power could not be achieved at one stroke. The king was instead forced to act in line with established organizational structures, while simultaneously operating on several levels. Hierarchies were institutes in both the clerical and the secular sphere. In several cases the sacral sphere preceded the secular sphere, thereby providing a foundation legitimizing the subsequent implementation of the secular hierarchy in practice. However contrary to Jensen's interpretation my opinion is that it could not be ruled out that the Guild of St Knud in its initial phase was a brotherhood of aristocratic warriors *and* merchants belonging to a commercial elite. It is also important to call attention to the fact that it is not possible to draw a strict dividing line between the two groups since the interests of crusaders and traders often coalesced.

The concept of power is thus associated here not just with a social relationship where one party is able to establish authority to enforce his will. Power should be regarded within the framework of a social and ideological interaction where both parties have something to gain through an agreement based on consensus. This exchange also includes a third, divine party. This ideology of consensus is a fundamental idea of brotherhood. The question is how the kings managed to use this relationship to their advantage. To elucidate this problem I would claim, like Tage E. Christiansen, that the *Brotherhood List* can only be understood against a European background.²⁸⁰ A comparison with European group formations is thus a natural step to take.

too scant to allow us to draw such far-reaching conclusions. K.V. Jensen, 2002, p. 80. The Swedish king Knut Eriksson and the jarl Birger Brosa forged close bonds to the Order of St John by supporting the brothers in their construction of a monastery in Eskilstuna.

280 T.E. Christiansen, 1966, p. 112. Christiansen discusses European brotherhood books, memorial books, and necrologies. In this connection he mentions brotherhoods established between the monasteries and their benefactors. It was common for the memorial lists of these brothers to be compiled for liturgical purposes. The days of their death were then

5.3 *The Ideology and Function of European Brotherhoods*

Chapter 11 dealt with Saxo Grammaticus' ideal of friendship, as seen in his stories about the relationship between Bishop William and King Svend, and between King Valdemar and Bishop Absalon. For Saxo these ideals primarily represent an idea of a righteous form of political government. The author's ideology of friendship – based on love, equality, the affinity of souls in the life to come, voluntariness, loyalty, justice, consensus, and mutual support – shows close similarities to the ideology of guild culture. The fundamental principles of these collectives derived from the discourse of friendship and love.²⁸¹ The brotherhoods were groups where the members combined voluntarily because they had a community of interest, which was the foundation for the ideology of consensus in the corporations.

Admission to a brotherhood meant that the member swore an oath to respect the rules about unreserved loyalty in relations between the brothers.²⁸² A crucial idea was that of reciprocity, providing support and assistance to each other in all spheres of life.²⁸³ In practice all the brothers were supposed to be equals regardless of their family or status. They were all subject to the administration of justice by the brotherhood, which had its own system of laws. The principle of equality was based on the Christian message of love, according to which all members of the Christian community were regarded as brothers. Unlike the transient friendship of this world – but like spiritual friendship – this brotherhood persisted in the life after this. The brotherhoods preserved the memory of their members through various ceremonies and rituals. For this purpose, monasteries and churches kept books of the dead or prayer lists in memory of the souls of deceased brothers.

commemorated through prayers and memorial services. Christiansen points out, however, that there are no European examples of brotherhood lists where groups of brothers are ordered according to a topographical system as in the case of the *Brotherhood List*. T.E. Christiansen, 1966, pp. 95 ff. On interpretations of the Norwegian guilds of the High and Late Middle Ages as geographical units, see e.g. H.M. Lindbach, 1997, pp. 111 ff. For a possible Norwegian parallel to the *Brotherhood List* see the *Sigdal List* from the first part of the fourteenth century. DN/8: 205. Erik Gunnes and Ole Jørgen Benedictow have interpreted the list as a register of members of a guild who were to be remembered with prayers after their death. O.J. Benedictow, 1986, pp. 11 ff.

281 The oldest statutes for the guild in Valenciennes in northern France come from the eleventh century. They begin with a number of moral rules of conduct, stipulating that the organization is a brotherhood based on love of God, love of one's neighbour, and love between the brothers. H.T. Gilkær, 1980, p. 127.

282 On admission to the brotherhood the new members often paid a fee.

283 C. Anz, 2002, pp. 24 ff. Anz stresses that a characteristic feature of the guilds/brotherhoods was that these were voluntary associations. He cites Otto Gierke's term *freie Einung*. C. Anz, 2002, p. 22. O. Gierke, 1868, pp. 359 f.

The guilds can thus be regarded as artificial families, held together by ritual kinship and ritual friendship.²⁸⁴ It was part of the political culture of the oath-taking society, which means that the brotherhoods should be considered as total social phenomena. This makes it impossible for us to draw a dividing line between spiritual and pragmatic bonds of friendship. When a medieval person made the decision to join a brotherhood, it was both a value-rational and a goal-rational act.

The saints played a prominent role in that admission to a guild involved swearing an oath with the patron saint of the brotherhood as witness. The new member had entered a divine alliance that could not be terminated. Ritual brotherhood was thus something qualitatively new in relation to other communities such as action-oriented groups of friends or kin groups whose bonds did not have the same sacral, eternal character.²⁸⁵ A shared feature, however, was the significance of gifts, with the essential difference that in groups of friends and kinsmen gifts were exchanged between *individuals* to keep the personal ties warm; the gifts functioned as lubricants in the political exchange. In the brotherhoods, on the other hand, gifts went to churches and monasteries in the form of donations, bequests, or annual payments. For the brotherhoods, the recipient was mostly a saint with whom the members wished to establish bonds of friendship in return for protection. Ultimately, however, the gifts had a similar function, as the brothers expected that the recipient would return the gift through his support.

Just as Saxo's ideology of friendship combined spirituality and pragmatism, as exemplified by Bishop Absalon, chief representative of the Skjalm group, these elements were also combined in the brotherhoods. The sacral character of these associations conveyed an exclusive quality by elevating them above all other forms of human relations. The brotherhoods involved a formalization of personal bonds by hedging them with special guarantees and fixed regulations.²⁸⁶ They could thus be interpreted as a step in the development towards a contract culture.

Sources like the *Gotland Letter* show that the guilds had a particular function for travellers and warriors, men who were cut off from the traditional

284 The concepts thus cannot be distinguished because they have complementary functions. See Pitt-Rivers's diagram in Chapter 3.

285 See the definition of ritual and its significance for social transformation in Chapter 3, p 113. Anz points out that Max Weber commented on medieval group culture by emphasizing the importance of oaths; he found that brotherhoods were something qualitatively new. C. Anz, 2002, p. 23.

286 To use Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical concept, all this could be interpreted to show that belonging to a brotherhood gave the members a permanent symbolic and social capital.

relations of protection prevailing on home soil. In these potentially dangerous situations, an important part was played by the relation of the brotherhoods to the monasteries in the form of donations in return for the monks' prayers. The monastic ties were universal and capable of bridging time and space, unlike transient ties of kinship and friendship.

As regards France and Germany, research in recent years has examined the interaction between monasteries, saints, and monks, and how secular groups in the form of religious brotherhoods and prayer communities (*societates*) became part of larger networks around the monasteries.²⁸⁷ These interaction mechanisms have been analysed by scholars such as Stephen D. White, Barbara H. Rosenwein, Dominique Barthélemy, Patrick Geary, and Kim Esmark.²⁸⁸

Esmark has studied how the French monasteries in the eleventh century played a highly active role for the formation of groups and networks. By making gifts to a monastery the donor could be adopted into a prayer community whose members, like the monks, were called brothers. In exchange the donor benefited from prayers and the protection and friendship of the saint in the form of a patron-client relationship. If the donor did not have the personal means to make a significant donation he could join a *confrérie*, a group making a shared donation.²⁸⁹ Gifts could be made for a wide range of purposes, for example to finance a forthcoming pilgrimage or crusade.²⁹⁰ A formalized religious community was thus established, centred on the monastery and its patron saint. The interaction can be illustrated in a model Fig. 7 which I have based freely on research by White, Barthélemy, and Esmark.²⁹¹

At the centre is Christ, as the link between God and man. Then comes the saint who is in the holy circle of God's close friends and thereby acts as an intermediary between Christ and mortals. Then come the monks, whose prayers provide a link in practice between humans and the saint. Finally, there is the prayer community, consisting of laymen whose donations render them the protection of the saint and the salvation of the soul through the monks' intercession. The model shows certain similarities to the political and communicative function of secular bonds of friendship, as described for instance by Gerd Althoff (see page 183). These socio-religious networks helped to formalize

287 Tage E. Christiansen touched on this topic in his analysis of the *Brotherhood List* when he mentioned how the monks prayed for the donors in return for their gifts. T.E. Christiansen, 1966, pp. 95 f.

288 S.D. White, 1988; B.H. Rosenwein, 1989; D. Barthélemy, 1993; P. Geary, 1994a; K. Esmark, 2002.

289 K. Esmark, 2002, p. 104.

290 K. Esmark, 2002, p. 150.

291 K. Esmark, 2002, pp. 116 ff.; D. Barthélemy, 1993 p. 367; S.D. White, 1988, pp. 155 f.

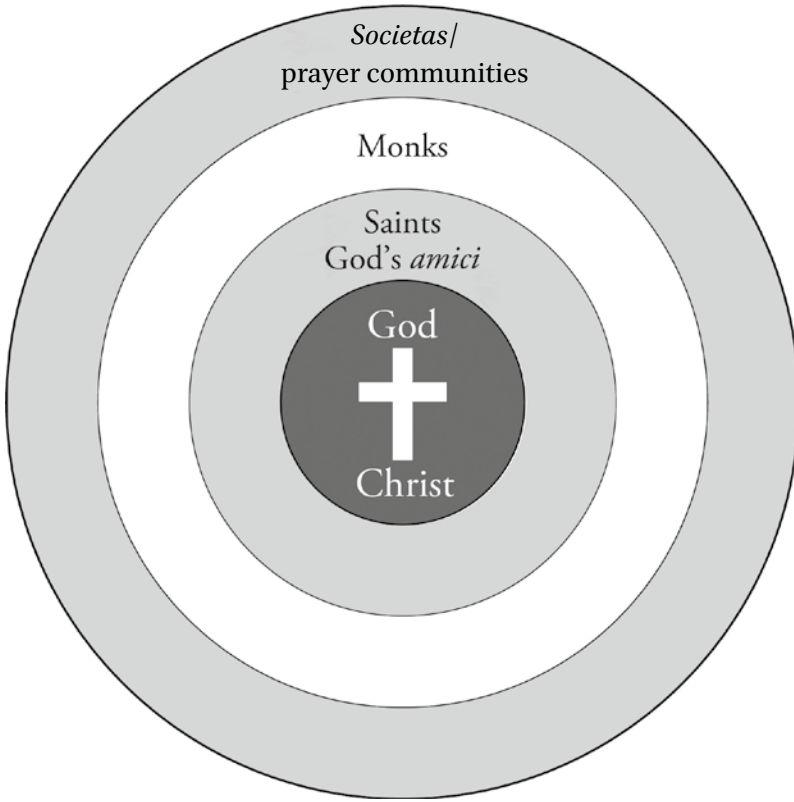


FIGURE. 7 Cult systems and prayer communities

previously unstable bonds in the form of kin and friend groups. They could create order in society by impeding conflict, as an enemy could be turned into a friend and brother.

A prayer community or a brotherhood could also be an important means of control. This must have been advantageous from a prince's perspective. What could this have meant for kings in Scandinavia? Let us now return to the *Brotherhood List*. What kind of logic is concealed behind the groupings of individuals designated as brothers? Is there a possibility that the source reflects a whole network of spiritual communities like the French *confréries*?

5.4 *Lord and Friend – Lord and Brother?*

When the Scandinavian kings adopted the policy of the reform popes it gave them something of a special position in Europe. As princes on the periphery of Christendom, kings like Sigurd the Crusader and Valdemar I assumed the role of standard-bearers of Christianity in the struggle against the infidels. The

popes' desperate need of princely allies in the struggle against the emperor made them benevolently inclined to proclaim members of their vassal's lineage as saints. This had the consequence that saint-kings acquired prominence in Scandinavia during the twelfth century.²⁹² Here they could also rely on a tradition established in the eleventh century through the cult of Olav the Holy with its centre in Nidaros (Trondheim).

Several monasteries were founded in Scandinavia on direct royal initiative. A monastery associated with a saint-king and built by a person related to this saint must have been a splendid instrument for gaining control over different groups in the elite. This gave an opportunity to exercise power via horizontal lines, and simultaneously to establish a vertical spiritual hierarchy. Unlike the saints of the French monasteries, the Danish saint-kings were recent innovations created on the king's initiative. In France there was an old cultic tradition based on the adoration of saints who had been active in the infancy of European Christianity. These were thus not in direct symbiosis with the king.

In fig. 8 I try to show how a cult system around a spiritual centre like Ringsted may have functioned.²⁹³ The model has great similarities to the French situation described by White and Esmark. It equates spiritual brotherhood in the form of the Guild of St Knud with the French prayer communities. A significant difference, however, is that the Danish cult model also includes a *fifth element* in the form of the saint's descendants, which means that the cult of Knud can be interpreted as a power system. In this spiritual hierarchical network, then, the descendants had a special position through inherited sanctity (*beata stirps*) and they had a personal grave prepared close to the martyr (*ad Sanctum*).²⁹⁴ An important part of this network was the brotherhoods or the guilds who had sworn an oath to the saint-king. The individuals who can be

292 The strategy of proclaiming representatives of the royal dynasties as saints was a widespread European phenomenon. See e.g. G. Klaniczay, 2002.

293 The picture sketched here of the active role of the Danish monasteries in group communities in society must be balanced against the interpretation of the isolation and vulnerability of the monasteries presented by Carsten Breengaard. C. Breengaard, 1982, pp. 61, 67. When it comes to the *Brotherhood List*, however, I would like to clarify that "group communities in society" chiefly refers to the highest elite, which need not have been the same as Breengaard's *potentes* or *bondones*, whom the author equates with the strong men in the local community.

294 See T. Hill, 1992, p. 153. This policy had been made possible as a consequence of the establishment of the Cistercian order. Kings and queens, according to the Cistercians, had the right to be buried in their abbeys and churches. In Scandinavia, Danish kings such as Valdemar I or Swedish kings such as Sverker the Elder therefore encouraged the establishment of the Cistercian order. This also applies to the queens. Hereditary saintliness had been practised by the Ottonians.

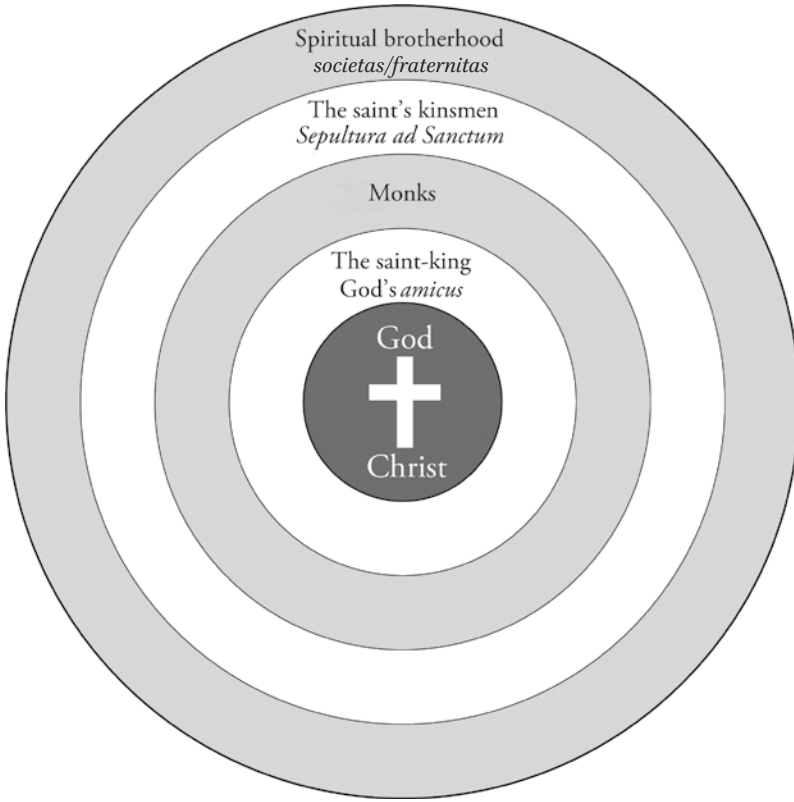


FIGURE. 8 Cult systems and spiritual brotherhoods

identified in the *Brotherhood List*, such as the members of the Skjalm group, thus show that the brothers were among the elite of the country. Consequently, the model also reveals an aspect of the interaction between the Valdemarian kings and the aristocracy.²⁹⁵

It has previously been noted that the medieval kings used bonds of friendship to legitimize their authority. The technique of rulership based on the

295 A similar system may also have applied to the cult around the grave of Knud the Holy in Odense. It also appears as if the most serious rival of Knud VI and Valdemar II as claimant to the throne, Bishop Valdemar, strove to create a cult around his brother, Count Niels, and his father, the former king Knud Magnúsen. T. Hill, 1992, pp. 164 ff. Bishop Valdemar made an attempt to seize the throne in 1192. On the threat from Bishop Valdemar see L. Hermanson, 2000, p. 194. Many of the Scandinavian kings who met a violent death in the twelfth century were worshipped as saints. The significance of an officially pronounced canonization has been exaggerated in previous research. It was not until the sixteenth century that the pope prohibited the cult of non-canonized saints.

prince being lord and friend at the same time meant that he could gain the loyalty of different powerful aristocrats. The question is whether a similar purpose lay behind the Guild of St Knud. In other words, did the king endeavour to be lord and *brother*, and what advantages did such a relationship give as compared to bonds of friendship? The admission of Valdemar I to the Guild of St Knud indicates that he must have been regarded as both lord and brother.

It is not easy to make a distinction between pure friend groups and brotherhoods, but a general characteristic is that groups of friends rarely had fixed rules, as they were mainly informal. Friend groups were systems of alliance between individuals, and the conditions varied depending on the context. Brotherhoods were permanent units with formal rules and they always required an oath – often with a saint as witness.²⁹⁶ If it was a saint-king this must have meant an aspect of control from above. If a king was accepted as lord and brother, an opportunity arose for the king not only to be integrated in the society's group culture but also to change this structure.

The question is whether the Danish brotherhoods should primarily be viewed as autonomous units with only a symbolic link to the king, or if they were important components in the Valdemarian system of lordship with its typical combination of secular and sacred elements. The late twelfth-century brotherhood may have entailed a step away from the arbitrary and unstable character of kin and friend groups. Since the sacred bonds of fraternity could not be broken, these collectives may have represented security, stability, and continuity. The fixed rules of the guilds could thus have contributed to a formalization of personal relations between the king and the aristocracy. In the *Gotland Letter* Valdemar pledges to acknowledge the brotherhood of the Gotland travellers as a Guild of St Knud on condition that he is granted the authority to approve its statutes. The king thus became, not just a direct participant in the guild's norms and political culture, but also capable of affecting its regulations.

Can we therefore trace a development from an elite dominated by groups of friends to an elite bound together by various brotherhoods? Is the *Brotherhood List* a specific phase in this development? It is difficult to detect any such process because both phenomena are variations on the same theme. Brotherhoods or friend groups, however, should not be regarded as the opposites of lordship. When it comes to the relationship between the kings and the aristocracy we ought to look at certain phenomena within the field: legitimation, sanction, and interaction.

Earlier research has often explained the *Brotherhood List* as a stage in the development of an institutional hierarchy in which the brothers have been

²⁹⁶ This ritual was also practised in the forging of friendship alliances. See Chapter 3.

interpreted as officers who were delegated royal powers in various parts of the kingdom.²⁹⁷ This source would then be a relic indicating the vertical exercise of power in practice. These scholars, however, skip several important stages that must have preceded the establishment of a state apparatus. An organization like this does not arise in a trice, as the king's powers and his control over the aristocracy at the end of the twelfth century were still very limited. Kurt Villads Jensen, for example, would see the *Lex Castrensis* as an expression of the obvious difficulty the kings had in curbing the magnates' large private armies.²⁹⁸

I also find it likely that the *Brotherhood List* can be interpreted as part of a phase in organizational development, but with the difference that I would see an expression of a system of lordship where the king acts along horizontal lines, that is, in accordance with the group culture of the time. Acting via brotherhoods, from this perspective, could be regarded as an early stage in the trend towards centralization of political power in the ruling royal family. Because the king was admitted as a brother he was integrated in the group community where he appeared as one among equals, but Valdemar I and Knud VI simultaneously had a special position by virtue of their blood ties to the patron saint of the brotherhood, Knud Lavard. The king thus could no longer be regarded as *primus inter pares*. Instead a patriarchal ideology was proclaimed, with the bond of friendship as a kind of spiritual hierarchy related to kin and family.

The Guild of St Knud may have been a way to ritualize the monarchy in new forms in that the royal presence acted on several levels in society. The role of the saint-king thus meant that the king acquired an active function in the mental and spiritual sphere that he would not otherwise have had. Earlier research has shown that the Guilds of St Knud and the saint's cult of Knud Lavard with its centre in Ringsted can be viewed as a means of dynastic competition.²⁹⁹ There is no reason to question this interpretation, but at the same time this is an aspect that is just one important part of a broader spectrum. We must also consider the role of the aristocracy here.³⁰⁰ What did the magnates gain from joining the cult community of St Knud?³⁰¹

297 J. Steenstrup, 1874; A.D. Jørgensen, 1898 (1st ed. 1872), pp. 262–343.

298 K.V. Jensen, 2002, pp. 76 ff.

299 E. Hoffman, 1975; H.T. Gilkær, 1980, pp. 121–161; T. Hill, 1992.

300 An important question is the role played by monasteries built by the aristocracy. The monasteries of Næstved, Sorø, and Esrum were probably surrounded by similar socio-religious bonds as the one in Ringsted. In the *Næstved Obituary*, for example, there is a list of the monasteries and guilds that were in a relations of brotherhood to the Næstved monastery. SRD. IV, p. 333; T.E. Christiansen, 1966, p. 95, n. 68. On the foundation of monasteries by magnates and bishops, see T. Hill, 1992, pp. 183–288, 289–336.

301 The same question is also valid for the commercial elite, i.e. the merchants. Parallels could here be drawn to e.g. the burghers of Bruges (see page 207) who had a lot to gain from proclaiming Charles the Good a martyr.

The function of the brotherhoods was part of the king's relationship to the aristocracy because he was integrated in the group culture of Danish medieval society, which may have rendered him greater control over the elite. The brothers' oath of loyalty to St Knud may therefore have led indirectly to a formalization of the magnates' ties to the king. Through their father and grandfather respectively, Valdemar I and Knud VI could establish a spiritual patriarchal bond with the aristocracy. The bond was thus not with the ruling kings personally, but with the holy patron, Knud Lavard, and the relics in Ringsted. The kings could thereby reign in the name of their dead ancestor.³⁰² In the 1170s the cult of Knud Lavard was implemented in practice, and it became a manifestation of the dynastic line of the Valdemarians. There was probably an ambition on the part of the kings to forge a spiritual bond elevated above all other forms of bonds. Swearing loyalty to a saint meant a lifelong pact with a higher divine power, a link that could not be broken. This ultimately meant that the king could assure himself of the loyalty of the sworn brothers in the future.

If we look at the political position of the new royal dynasty at the end of the twelfth century, it may be noted that Valdemar I and his sons were threatened from several quarters. Representatives of rival dynasties, such as the descendants of Knud the Holy and Knud Magnussen's son, Bishop Valdemar, conspired against the royal family, and part of the elites of Skåne and Jutland were in opposition to the central power.³⁰³ The Valdemarians therefore tried by various means to gain the support of the aristocracy and the commercial elite.³⁰⁴ There was thus a great need to legitimize the Valdemarian line and

302 If we proceed from Max Weber's concept of power, then, we can observe that the Valdemars legitimized their authority by combining charisma with tradition.

303 Saxo appears to have had a rather negative attitude to the cult of saint-princes. Perhaps he viewed it as a threat to the status of the aristocracy. A certain scepticism of the cult of Knud the Holy can be read between the lines in *Gesta Danorum* probably because he was influenced by the *Roskilde Chronicle*. It could also be explained as a result of the fact that the descendants of Knud the Holy, Karl and Knud Karlsen, revolted against Valdemar I. However, Archbishop Absalon, who commissioned Saxo's history, was related to the family of Knud the Holy, so the author could not put forward any explicit criticism of that king. Nor can Saxo be described as a keen propagandist for the saint's cult of Knud Lavard. See L. Hermanson, 2000, pp. 204 ff. Snorri Sturluson in *Heimskringla* likewise takes a dim view of saint-kings, see B. Sawyer, 2008, pp. 50 ff.

304 One must also consider the relevance of the *Brotherhood List* for Valdemar II's times. Why was it regarded as being worthy of inclusion in King Valdemar's cadastre? Was the source a historic document of value for the reigning king, and if so in what way? Perhaps it was above all parts of the Danish aristocracy who had an interest in seeing that the list was included in the cadastre?

simultaneously impose order, stability, and continuity.³⁰⁵ An important stage in this strategy was to make Ringsted into what Thomas Hill calls a “Hauskloster”, that is, a dynastic necropolis representing the tradition and sanctity of the line.³⁰⁶ The family members could thereby mark their status in relation to other royal dynastic lines. The saint’s cult of Knud Lavard consequently meant that the Valdemarians managed to create a new prestigious symbolic capital that brought respect in the sphere of power politics.

This technique of sacral lordship was not specific for the Valdemarians, however. Duke Buris Henriksen had probably founded the monastery of Tvis for a similar purpose. Bishop Valdemar’s construction of the Guldholm monastery can also be viewed as a move in the same strategy. Through the Guilds of St Knud, however, the Valdemarians may have succeeded in attaching much of the country’s elite to them in the form of a spiritual patron-client relationship. The magnates’ donations to the monastery church in Ringsted were of crucial significance for the establishment of this bond. We can see here a parallel to Europe and the prayer communities described by Kim Esmark. This opens the possibility of elucidating the motives of the aristocracy for joining the Guild of St Knud and thus forming a holy alliance with the ruling royal family.

5.5 *The Redirection of Gift Exchange*

By making gifts to the monastery, the magnates obtained the protection and friendship of the saint.³⁰⁷ The monks were in turn obliged to pray for the donors. This could have been particularly important for the Danish guild brothers when they set off on campaigns against infidels or when they were about to start important trading expeditions. For the crusaders, death was constantly lurking around the corner, as there must have been great loss of life in the struggles against Slavs and Balts. Also the merchant’s trading expeditions were associated with great risks of life and limb. In all probability, then, there was a pent-up spiritual need to ensure salvation for the soul through gifts and

305 Parallels can be drawn with Sweden and the strategy of the Erik dynasty to have Knut Eriksson’s father, Erik Jedvardsson, proclaimed as a saint; see T. Lindkvist, 2007, pp. 35 ff. According to Christian Oertel, however, the cult of St Erik was chiefly promoted by the clerics in Uppsala. C. Oertel, 2016, p. 94.

306 T. Hill, 1992, pp. 46 ff., 154 ff.

307 The donations themselves must also have meant that the aristocracy’s material interests were partially tied to Ringsted and thus indirectly to the king. According to the “keeping while giving” principle (see A.G. Weiner, 1992; K. Esmark, 2002, p. 110), the donor still exerted an influence over his land even after it had been transferred to a monastery or a church. The charters show that gifts were often made in the form of chattels. See e.g. DD 1: 3, no. 135.

prayers. As a guild brother and by virtue of his blood ties, the king was obliged to implement the protection and support for his brothers. But it was a reciprocal relationship because the brothers, according to the rules of the guild, were duty-bound to assist the king.

Here it is possible to detect a transformation in the role of friendship in power relations between the king and his subjects. We have previously observed the crucial part played by gift exchange for the power of popular princes. In the Ottonian Empire, as in Scandinavia, leaders strove to acquire a central position in the flow of information, gifts, and favours. They could do this through sumptuous feasts where they showered their men with gifts to ensure their loyalty. This policy required considerable resources to buy the loyalty of the subjects. An example of a king who applied this strategy is the Norwegian king Eystein, who got the men of Jämtland to swear loyalty and friendship to him (see page 185).

Kings by the grace of God, such as Valdemar I and Knud VI, endeavoured to make themselves independent of this costly exchange of gifts, with the inevitable consequence that they had to pursue an aggressive policy, geared to conflict, so that they could afford to reward their allies. One method was to redirect the exchange of gifts by emphasizing the significance of the spiritual friendship with St Knud. The concentration of gifts at the saint's grave in Ringsted meant in practice that it was instead the subjects who indirectly made donations to the king and the ecclesiastical organization. Kings by the grace of God could thereby retain their central position in the flow of gifts, while simultaneously obtaining greater material sources, together with the church. This was thus a step towards breaking free from the obligations of personal bonds of friendship.

These obligations were transferred to a spiritual level in that it was instead the saint who was expected to give the donors protection, success, and prosperity.³⁰⁸ In terms of domestic policy, this meant that the kings could pursue a policy more geared to peace. As for foreign policy, it meant that the military brotherhoods fighting in the name of St Knud on their own initiative could acquire a material surplus. They were thus fighting for the king but he did not need to take an active part himself as their commander.³⁰⁹ According to the

308 The redirection of gift exchange could be interpreted according to Karl Polanyi's theories of the transition from an organization resting on reciprocity, i.e. gifts between equals, to a redistributive system based on a social hierarchy. K. Polanyi, 1957 (1st ed. 1944); F. Block & M.R. Somers, 1984, pp. 47–84. This would then be reciprocity on a spiritual level but redistribution in practice.

309 Compare the active role of princes as military commanders in the Norwegian-Icelandic skaldic poems. In these sources it is the king's concrete actions on the battlefield that are praised.

Gotland Letter this enhanced the “royal glory”.³¹⁰ In this context the many crusades helped to satisfy the subjects’ need for resources. We could thus conclude that a popular prince was dependent on friendship in its capacity of a social capital built up from below. The king by the grace of God strove instead to transform the bond of friendship into a symbolic capital proceeding from the sacred charisma surrounding the saint-king and the divine office of king. This spiritual friendship was bestowed from above as a gift from the king in return for the gifts of his subjects in the Christian-sanctioned hierarchy.

The pompous proclamation of the hierarchical character of kingship in the diplomas of the Valdemarian princes was probably an authority that was initially valid only in theory. These formulas on parchment tell us very little about how the exercise of power functioned in practice.³¹¹ For a long time there must surely have been parallel forms of lordship. The kings were therefore forced to adapt their techniques of lordship depending on varying power relations in different territories. Lordship in peripheral areas such as Halland and parts of Skåne was almost certainly not the same as in central parts of the kingdom.³¹²

5.6 *Oaths, Brotherhood, and Lordship*

It is likely that the guilds in the latter part of the twelfth century were highly significant in the exercise of power by the king. The spiritual brotherhoods offered an opportunity to combine the pursuit of domestic policy with foreign policy. To begin with, if we are to rely on Jensen’s interpretation, the primary importance of the Guilds of St Knud was probably in the crusades, where the brothers fought in the name of the patron saint. Here the king could build on the traditional ideal of the military commander, the charismatic and victorious general winning the appreciation and loyalty of his men. Through the crusades this ideal was given a new dimension. The king’s role as defender of Christianity could also be used for domestic policy purposes. In the twelfth century there was no national army under the king. Sources such as Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum* and the *Lex Castrensis* reveal the king’s constant problem of controlling the magnates’ private forces. If the powerful military leaders in the

310 Compare the Ottonian princely ideal or the Scandinavian “popular prince” where it is the reverse, the king conferring honours on the aristocracy. In the theocratic Valdemarian lordship there was a mutual exchange of honour. The king acknowledges the brotherhood as the Guild of St Knud, which enhances the status of the members, while Valdemar simultaneously lends his royal honour to their work.

311 N. Damsholt, 1970, pp. 98 f.

312 On differences in lordship techniques between centre and periphery in Norway see H.J. Orning, 2008.

kingdom joined a brotherhood based on a holy alliance sworn in the name of St Knud – what consequences could this have?

It probably meant a greater opportunity for the king to control the magnates' military retinues. At the same time, the guild brothers must also have been given firmer guarantees of shares in war booty, in accordance with the rules of the guild. The brotherhood may also have helped to give certain elite strata a common identity and status because of the exclusiveness of their associations. Membership could thus have functioned as an esoteric demonstration vis-à-vis other groups in society which were not initiated in the secrets of the brotherhood.³¹³ Through time this identity was connected to the Valdemarian kings. This no doubt inhibited conflict within the kingdom. Internal conflicts between aristocratic collectives or revolts against the Valdemarians could thus be curbed. One could break a bond of loyalty to a living prince, but not to a saint.

In the oath-taking society, broadly based sworn confederations (*federationes, coniurationes*) were among the most serious threats to reigning kings.³¹⁴ Within a kingdom there were often several groups that had sworn loyalty to other rulers and therefore regarded them as their primary lords and friends. In practice they were not real subjects of the king until they had taken a personal oath of loyalty to him. This led to the fall of the Danish king Niels, for example. The inhabitants of the town of Schleswig had entered a *coniuratio* with their patron lord Knud Lavard, but they evidently did not feel that they had any obligations of loyalty to Niels the reigning king.³¹⁵ Similar cases can be demonstrated for Norway, such as Snorri's accounts of relations between Jämtland and King Eysteinn of the alliance of the men of Viken with Inge Haraldsson's

313 The brotherhoods can thus be interpreted as a phenomenon that can be associated with the social formation of the Danish aristocracy. See Chapter 2.

314 One example is the *coniurationes* established in the Duchy of Saxony as a reaction to abuses by Henry the Lion. G. Althoff, 1990, p. 124.

315 C. Radtke, 2002, pp. 42 ff. According to Christian Radtke, during the years 1131–1134 Schleswig functioned as a politically sovereign sworn unit acting both inwardly and outwardly. C. Radtke, 2002, p. 47. The almost contemporary *Roskilde Chronicle*, however, writes that the people of Schleswig had sworn loyalty to Niels but they broke their promise. *Chronicon Roskildense*, Ch. 17. Yet Radtke thinks that the author of the chronicle did not understand that the inhabitants of the town had sworn loyalty to Knud Lavard, not King Niels. He also refers to the German priest Helmold, who writes that the townspeople killed Niels as a "favour" – *gratia* – to Knud's half-brother and avenger, Erik Emune. The *Roskilde Chronicle*, according to L. Weibull, is positively inclined to King Niels and his government. L. Weibull, 1928, pp. 106–112. However there are good reasons to be sceptical to Weibull's interpretation since the chronicle's portrayal of Niels as a ruler is far from laudatory.

descendants. This type of collective loyalty can also be found in the chronicle of Galbert of Bruges.

The brotherhoods may also have been used to quash domestic revolts, as in the case of the uprisings in Skåne at the end of the twelfth century. The *Brotherhood List* does not include Skåne, which hints that the elite in Skåne were initially not integrated in the Guilds of St Knud. Consequently, they were not the king's sworn men, so the men of Skåne were in a looser form of subordination to the Valdemarian royal family.³¹⁶ Perhaps one could consider the possibility that the *Brotherhood List* may have been compiled in a crisis as a form of *coniuratio/federatio* intended to create unity and mutual support to put down a rebellion against the king.³¹⁷

The kingship of Valdemar the Great had thus been shaken to its foundation by the first uprising in Skåne in 1181. The second revolt, according to Saxo, broke out after the death of Valdemar I the following year. The position of Knud VI as heir to the throne could not be taken for granted. He was forced, for example, to counter a serious threat to the rebel king Harald Skreng, who mobilized forces in Sweden and Skåne. In this situation the king needed all the support he could get, and therefore had to establish, as quickly as possible, a network of sworn federations to ensure the maximum assembled loyalty.³¹⁸

Sworn confederations had a function of creating order and peace.³¹⁹ The Valdemarian kings therefore aimed to establish an exclusive oath of loyalty

316 In border lands like Skåne in Denmark or Västergötland and Småland in Sweden the inhabitants could be variously subject to different Swedish or Danish royal and clerical dynasties.

317 Several examples of this type of collective pacts can be found in Europe. See e.g. C. Radtke, 2002, p. 51. The Scanian rebellions were triggered by Archbishop Absalon's replacing of the Scanian aristocracy with his own kinsmen and allies from Zealand in the administration of the province. Thus also the Archbishop's politics could be considered as a threat to the king.

318 According to Saxo, however, this revolt was combated solely with Archbishop Absalon's forces. L. Hermanson, 2000, p. 245. The author's account of the uprising in Skåne, however, is portrayed from the perspective of the Skjalm clan. The bishop himself was probably Saxo's main informant.

319 The bonds between the members of a weapon brotherhood were often stronger than their affiliation to any political faction. Saxo, for example, tells of how Bishop Absalon's brother Esbern Snare came close to being captured and killed by Svend Grathe's men after the murder of Knud Magnusen. Among these men, however, there was a man named Peder Tenja. He asked to speak with Esbern and gave his "word of honour" that his men would not have him killed. Saxo writes that Peder was the only one of Svend Grathe's allies that Esbern trusted because he was "one of his old comrades" (*antiquae societatis fiducia*). Perhaps this is an allusion to an earlier weapon brotherhood when they had fought side by side. Saxo, 14.19.7.

that outshone all the many sworn associations in Denmark.³²⁰ The strategy was a step towards the establishment of a relationship of obedience between king and subjects, no longer based as much on bonds of personal friendship or loyalty between two parties.³²¹ This is expressed in the *Gotland Letter*, where the king's emissary advises the guild brothers to "obey God and the laws". One idea behind the sacred sworn confederations was to get away from the arbitrary character of traditional groups based on friendship, where people often abandoned their leader if he found himself in adversity.³²² The sworn confederations can thus be interpreted as part of a process of creating general trust.

For the king, spiritual friendship and the idea of brotherhood were a more effective instrument of power than personal friendships. This ideology was based on solidarity subordinate to a higher power – unlike horizontal ties of friendship with their direct obligations to provide mutual assistance. It was thus in the interest of the ruler to assert the exclusive quality of spiritual friendship because it legitimized his position as God's proxy. This bond could therefore be used to maintain and justify his lordship. The princes sought not only to be loved like a friend and simultaneously honoured as a prince, but also to be accepted as a brother and simultaneously hailed as a lord.

In the Guilds of St Knud there was a spiritual vertical bond that set its stamp on the horizontal group culture in the form of the religious associations. There was a possibility here for the kings to make use of a Christian hierarchy based, in descending order, on Christ, the saint-king, the saint's descendants, the monastery, the monks, and at the bottom the guild brothers. This established one of several important conditions that could prepare the way for later

320 The writing of the *Lex Castrensis* should be interpreted in this context. It is asserted there that the warriors shall "be united in brotherly love" under a common hird law. See Chapter 2.

321 Hans Jacob Orning writes that "A relationship of obedience contrasts with friendship by being essentially a one-sided and impersonal subordinate relationship". H.J. Orning, 2008, p. 51. Orning also believes that the Norwegian kings could escape the mutual obligations of friendship by attaching men to the hird through bonds of service between the commander and his warriors. H.J. Orning, 2008, p. 89. The codification of the Danish *Lex Castrensis* and the king's involvement in the Guild of St Knud could be interpreted as phases in a similar development. There is a risk, however, that we end up back at square one; in other words, that the men in the *Brotherhood List* can be interpreted as the king's loyal officials/hirdmen, who had been stationed as his representatives at various places in the kingdom. There is a significant difference in the degree of subordination: the fraternity of weapon brothers is essentially equal, in contrast to a soldier's relationship of service.

322 Examples of this are the Norwegian king Eystein Haraldsson or the Danish king Svend Grathe.

implementing kingship by the grace of God in practice. A brotherhood in the form of the Guild of St Knud could have been an important step in this development. The aristocracy and perhaps the commercial elite cannot be said to have been forced into submission to divinely sanctioned kingship. It was more a matter of the magnates, as a result of socio-religious interaction with the Valdemarian kings, forging a pact based on consensus and honourable submission. It therefore seems to be worth considering the possibility that the *Brotherhood List* can be set in a context like this.

We can thus observe that spiritual friendship was not something that applied only to monks within the walls of the monastery. Nor can it be regarded as a scholarly product of royal propaganda. In eleventh – and twelfth-century Scandinavia there was a sacralization of political culture. As part of this process, the kings played a leading role. The brotherhoods were based on ideals of collective friendship and these could be transferred without difficulty to a Christian context. As mentioned before, older historical studies of the Scandinavian societies in the High Middle Ages have mainly concentrated on the development of the state. Researchers have painted a picture of a process by which the kin society was replaced by the state society. The driving forces in this development were the king and the church, who imposed centralized government from above, through the exercise of institutional power.

This picture has been criticized in recent years. Several historians have asserted the significance of how the elite, by using social networks, consolidated their power positions.³²³ In this connection socio-political interaction and bonds of friendship are key concepts. This research, however, has mainly dealt with the function of friendship in forging alliances.³²⁴ The question of the role played by Christian ideology in the process and how a broadly based collective solidarity was established around new government through a socio-religious interaction has not been as prominent.

Here I have tried to show how, parallel to the elite's horizontal networks there were a great many other social organizations, the brotherhoods being important examples. In these communities friendship was a fundamental element both functionally and ideologically: On the horizontal and functional level because the brothers regarded each other as equals. They had sworn to fulfil the obligations of friendship by assisting each other in all phases of life. The concept of brother was a guarantee that it was a sincere and honest

323 S. Bagge, 1991; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 1993; M.H. Gelting, 1999a; L. Hermanson, 2000; Auður Magnúsdóttir, 2001; H.J. Orning, 2008.

324 This applies in large measure, for example, to my own earlier research.

relationship.³²⁵ On the vertical and ideological level because the communities hailed the idea behind Christian brotherhood, love or *caritas*, and the vertical friendship of the patron saint. This created active interaction with the church as an organization. It was above all here that the king found the meaningful bonds within the group culture that he could exploit to create solidarity and backing for kingship by the grace of God. Consequently, this can be seen as an example of how the Christian ideology of lordship was implemented in practice.³²⁶ Collective friendship comprised all social strata, and it developed through time to become an important element in constituting society.

The picture painted here of the relationship of the Danish kings to the guilds, however, should be regarded as representing a short phase associated with the vigorous crusading under Valdemar I and his sons. That the guilds acquired a different role in the thirteenth century could be explained, in part, by the fact that the crusades no longer had as prominent a position in the activities of the elite. During this century the plunder economy was gradually replaced by a trade economy, which meant that the burghers emerged as a separate social group. The upswing in commerce and the growth of the towns had the result that the guilds increasingly began to be regarded as trading companies. Perhaps the function of the brotherhoods in enhancing status was no longer relevant at the time when the cadastre was compiled. It may have been in the interest of the Danish aristocracy to include the *Brotherhood List* in the cadastre in order to demonstrate the prominent position of these magnates in society. It does not appear unlikely that this position, and the pact that rested on consensus, was being threatened as Valdemar II increasingly relied on foreign advisors and officials of lower birth.

The guilds had no prominent role in the exercise of power by Danish kings in the later part of the thirteenth century, when power relations had changed. The church then emerged more and more as an autonomous institution alongside the crown, with the result that the archbishops were not infrequently

325 Calling an unrelated person brother or sister is the strongest expression today to mark an intimate affinity between two people, far more powerful than the term friend. Compacts of brotherhood or sisterhood are also easier to incorporate in wider collective contexts.

326 This is thus an interpretation that shows how ideology is implemented in practice through consensus. Yet this explanation in no way excludes other, more conflict-oriented interpretations. The Christian ideology of lordship was also exercised through coercion and threats. Examples that can be mentioned are the threats in royal diplomas of divine punishment of those who dare to defy the king's decisions, or the religious rhetoric in *Sverris saga*, according to which all resistance to the kingship of Sverre was against the will of God.

in conflict with the king.³²⁷ The period 1170–1220 thus represented not just a specific military development associated with the crusades, but also a special phase in the development of the monarchy.

6 Summing Up

This chapter has dealt with the role of vertical friendship in the Scandinavian exercise of power in the High Middle Ages. This bond guaranteed the individual's security in a social organization based on relations of protection. This in turn meant that friendship was a necessary condition for lordship. I have discussed how the transformation of society in twelfth-century Norway and Denmark contributed to changing the function of friendship bonds in the political and social structure. During this period the Scandinavian countries gradually developed from traditional lordship to a European form of institutionalized government. In traditional lordship the prince ruled by building up his power from below via personal ties with farmers and magnates. Kingship by the grace of God rested instead on a formalized hierarchical organization in which the prince, by virtue of his sacral office, demanded the unconditional loyalty of his subjects.

Norway in the civil war era has illustrated how political conflicts gradually prepared the way for the new form of government. I have studied how friendship functioned in practice as regards power relations, social organization, and military mobilization. Like the Icelandic chieftains, the Norwegian leaders built up their positions with the aid of horizontal alliances and patron-client bonds. In the sources these relations are described as friendships. Through gifts, generosity, and assurances of protection, kings and pretenders gained followers, who promised in exchange to give their lord political support. This was often synonymous with offering their military services, because a true friend was always supposed to be prepared to take up arms for his ally.

Vertical friendship was however a two-edged sword. From a consensus perspective, the relationship can be viewed as a freely contracted agreement of reciprocity and trust, where both parties had something to gain from the bond. But with the feuding culture of the Middle Ages, there was widespread mistrust which could be exploited by power-hungry commanders in Norway. In vertical bonds of friendship it was therefore often the patron who determined the conditions, so that in many cases the bond was a coercive relationship with

327 In the latter part of the thirteenth century the attitude of the central government to the guilds became increasingly sceptical because the king's public legislation not infrequently conflicted with the judicial practice of the guilds.

restricted freedom of choice. Respect for the violent reputation of the military leader was then the foundation for the clients' choice to accept the friendship that was offered. In this insecure environment, friendship could thus represent love, consensus, and voluntary cooperation, but also force, coercion, and submission.

The military base of kings and claimants to the throne consisted of groups of friends. A successful tactic was to avoid large battles and instead use pinpointed actions to attack the enemy's personal power base. By systematically killing the adversary's friends one by one, the foundation for his lordship could be undermined. The escalating conflicts for the Norwegian throne led to the dissolution of traditional protector relations. The elimination strategies meant that patron-client alliances in the local community were weakened as the magnates in the area were killed. This also had significant consequences at the regional level because the horizontal alliance systems were seriously damaged. Friendship pacts could be deadly dangerous for the magnates, who sought other relations instead, such as serving in the plundering royal war bands. The farmers could now no longer rely on the protection of local lords and were forced instead to accept the friendship offered to them by the victors in the combat, which in practice was synonymous with total submission.

Kings found that groups based on friendship were unstable and difficult to control. If a powerful aristocratic ally was killed, it ultimately meant that his local network was lost too. A king could also lose his friends in a short time if they chose to switch to the other side. Relations of service based on obedience therefore became increasingly important. In exchange, a successful warlord could reward his men with conquered property and territorial fiefs. As the ravages affected all strata in society, this paved the way for hierarchical royal rule. The triumphant warlords portrayed themselves as Christian princes of peace, vowing to establish order and security.

When warlords such as King Sverre offered the people their friendship, the reciprocal element meant only that he guaranteed them peace and freedom from repression. In these situations the kings exploited the Christian ideology of friendship by transforming the logic of the patronage system. They set themselves above personal obligations of protection when they claimed to be champions of the Christian order in the struggle against Satan's henchmen. The ideal of the popular prince with many friends, based on active generosity and reciprocity, was gradually replaced by a patriarchal ideal of lordship, where the king's friendship consisted of fatherly care for a grateful collective of peace-loving subjects.

As for Denmark, the analysis has chiefly focused on how the Valdemarian victors went about building support for the new Christian kingship. In this

connection I have examined how friendship was used as an ideological instrument to legitimize power. A comparison with Norway reveals that twelfth-century Denmark, in many respects, underwent a parallel political and ideological development. For several decades the kingdom endured bloody conflicts between representatives of different branches of Svend Estridsen's descendants. Valdemar I finally emerged victorious from the struggle and endeavoured thereafter to consolidate his royal power.

The victorious elite was nevertheless torn by internal tensions. After Valdemar succeeded to the throne he had a debt of gratitude to the many magnates who had supported him on the battlefield. At the beginning of his reign the king was probably bound by various oaths and personal obligations to the aristocracy. He therefore tried by various means to distance his own dynasty from the magnates' families and rival branches of the royal line. Sources such as Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* and the royal charters reflect the tensions in the ruling stratum. Saxo (like Snorri Sturluson) advocates a form of lordship that can be associated with the ideal of the popular prince, while the charters proclaim a Christian hierarchical mode of government. *Gesta Danorum* emphasizes the gratitude of the kings to certain friends in the high aristocracy as a reason why the parties ought to rule together in harmony. The diplomas represent a different ideology, declaring that the king has received his power from God, which means that all groups in society should bow to the royal majesty and gratefully accept their lord's friendship without demanding anything in return.

This form of government had little validity in practice, however. The king's power position was not sufficiently strong to enable him to curb the royal kinsmen and the magnates by force. Instead the new government was based on an ideology of consensus. By transferring the traditional norms and values of the oath-taking society to a spiritual context, the Valdemarians were able to establish new forms of communication with the aristocracy and other groups in society. The saint's cult of Valdemar I's father, Knud Lavard, served a three-fold purpose: (1) It contributed to distancing the royal family from rival royal kinsmen by bestowing a special charisma on the Valdemarian dynasty. (2) Relations with the upper aristocracy found new ritual expressions, with the magnates swearing an exclusive oath of loyalty to the patron saint, Knud. (3) The ideology of sacral kingship may also have gained a hearing among the broader strata of the population because it went hand in hand with the beliefs of the guild culture.

In collaboration with representatives of the church organization, the Valdemarians strove to anchor this ideology in the communities of the oath-taking society. It was of crucial importance to forge meaningful bonds between

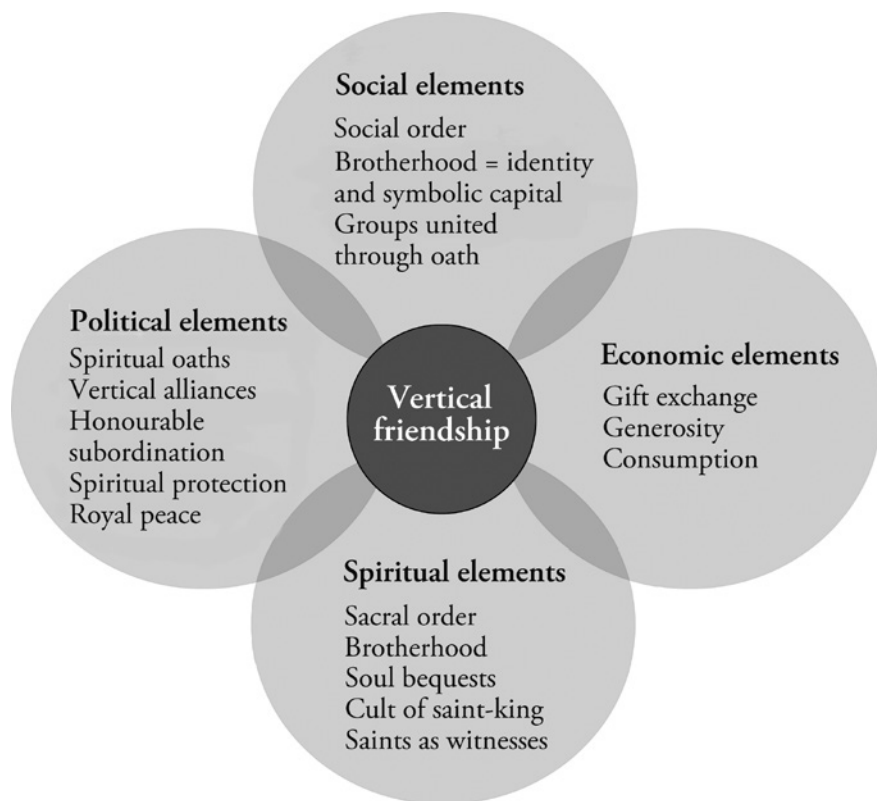


FIGURE. 9 Vertical friendship as a “total social phenomenon”

rulers and subjects. Vertical friendship can be interpreted here as a total social phenomenon. The basic components in this sacral exercise of power can be displayed in the model in figure 9.

Royal power became a part of the social order when it was adapted to the brotherhood ideal of the prevailing group culture, where collective friendship played a prominent part. Brotherhood was associated with social transformation and identity. The *Gotland Letter* can be interpreted as showing that an already existing organization of magnates decided to enhance their status by founding a religious guild dedicated to St Knud. The Danish aristocracy was a warrior caste which, under Valdemar I, had become increasingly involved in crusades against the Wendish and Baltic peoples. In this warrior culture there was a long tradition of organizing in various forms of military brotherhood. The establishment of the Guild of St Knud gave both the aristocracy and the king greater symbolic capital. The traditional initiation rites were thereby transformed to suit a new context in that the guild brothers swore an oath to

a heavenly protector. The crusades probably contributed to the shaping of a collective identity where the brothers believed they were fighting for a higher power.

The principles of the traditional gift society lived on, but the Valdemarians ritualized the exchange of gifts in new forms. Membership of the Guild of St Knud had to be confirmed with generous donations to the newly founded sacred centre in Ringsted. These gifts filled a religious function in that the spiritual recipients promised to pray for the donors' salvation. The guilds had previously held various kinds of ceremonial feasts which appear to have been a widespread phenomenon all over the kingdom. In the twelfth century these rites were attached more closely to the cult of saints, which may have meant that the sacred order gradually penetrated the folk culture as well.

Within this order the aristocratic brotherhoods were part of a vertical context, having sworn an oath of loyalty to a sacral patron. The fact that the saint was a witness meant that the brothers supported a permanent political order that was not negotiable. The magnates' alliances with the king were therefore more a matter of subordination, but it was an honourable submission because they were serving a celestial patron. The king simultaneously pledged in God's name to guarantee peace and protection. By trying to link the magnates' oaths to a political and religious centre, the Valdemarians wanted to drive a wedge into the mass of horizontal and vertical covenants which had previously been an impenetrable obstacle to control and efficient centralized power.

The Danish kings thus aspired to strengthen their position by acting in accordance with the traditional forms of political culture, characterized by rituals, oaths, gift exchange, personal ties, and relations of protection. The structuring role of personal friendships in relations between the king and the subjects was weakened as the central power grew stronger. Yet friendship continued to have a function in constituting society, but this developed in a new Christian garb.

In several respects the political and ideological development in Denmark was similar to that in Norway. Yet there were also differences. Norwegian kings and magnates, such as Sigurd the Crusader and Erling Skakke, were active in the crusades but Norway, unlike Denmark, cannot be described as a crusading state. In the latter part of the twelfth century the majority of the Danish aristocracy were engaged in warfare against external enemies such as the Wends.³²⁸ In this context the Danish kings could assume the role of defenders of Christianity. The crusading ideology set its stamp on the aristocracy's military brotherhoods, which developed through time into spiritual associations. Here the cult of saints may have played a different role in Denmark than in Norway.

328 This also applies to other social groups.

The Norwegian kings and pretenders liked to assert their descent from Olav the Holy, but they were unable to acquire the same symbolic capital that Valdemar I succeeded in obtaining when his own father was canonized. The Danish magnates were also able, during a few decades, to acquire material resources abroad through the crusades. The Danish king had a central ideological role here as the leading standard-bearer on the campaigns. This provided a seed-bed for a broader collective identity in the Danish aristocracy – an identity enjoying a status associated with the ruling royal dynasty.

Nothing comparable can be detected in Norway.³²⁹ The Norwegian kings could not portray themselves as defenders of the fatherland in the struggle against pagan enemies as a way to gain broad aristocratic support. In the Norwegian political propaganda it was instead the rivals for the crown who were painted as enemies of God. Another difference between the two countries is that the kingdom of Denmark was constantly threatened by the emperor, who regarded the Danish kings as vassals. In the struggle for independence the Valdemarians sought, and gained, the support of the popes, which was not the case with Norwegian princes such as King Sverre.

The Swedish source material does not permit any detailed interpretations of the transition from traditional lordship to kingship by the grace of God. Charters issued by Knut Eriksson and the jarl Birger Brosa nevertheless show that the princes had adopted a Christian patriarchal ideology of lordship in which the subjects were viewed as a collective of friends. Like the Valdemarians and their predecessors, the Swedish kings tried to create dynastic saints to give their own kin a special aura. In the diplomas it is also possible to find traces of the royal families' and the aristocracy's socio-religious interaction with the ecclesiastical institutions of the kingdom. The exchange of gifts between, for example, the spiritual brotherhood of Julita monastery and the Swedish elite displays several parallels to the situation in Denmark and western Europe.

We can thus conclude that, when the thirteenth century began, the Christian idea of friendship, love, and brotherhood had become an integral part of lordship in all three kingdoms in Scandinavia.

329 As has previously been observed, however, the Norwegian kings were early in showing an interest in the guilds through their linkage to the cult of Olav the Holy.

Epilogue

1 Why Friendship?

At the 26th Congress of Nordic Historians in Reykjavík in 2007 one of the main themes was a session about friendship and patronage systems. In many respects it was a rewarding event with lively discussions. In the concluding exchange of views between the panel and the auditorium, some listeners put forward interesting opinions. One professor admitted to being sceptical of research on friendship. He shrugged his shoulders and exclaimed “Friendship – so what?” He did not find it very surprising that individuals in pre-modern times had friends and established social networks. Why expend so much effort on analysing this? He thus questioned the potential of friendship research to raise fruitful questions and explain historical processes.

I have encountered this critique in different versions before. Some historians claim that the terminology of friendship in the sources is chiefly an expression of social conventions with no profound societal meaning. They thus proceed from our modern perception of friendship as a phenomenon belonging to the private sphere in that it is an emotional relationship between two individuals. Yet I must acknowledge that the professor's question is justified. We must be able to explain *why* bonds of friendship are interesting for historical studies and how they can contribute to a greater understanding of structures and processes in historical societies. The aim of this book has therefore been to clarify some problems that these studies can elucidate and what theoretical perspectives can be applied in this research field.

1.1 *Friendship and Society*

The choice to begin the study with *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes felt natural because that author represents an early modern outlook on the individual and society. Hobbes believed that people were impelled by the instinct for self-preservation and self-interest. The Old Testament monster Leviathan, representing total submission, illustrates the anarchy that would break out if people were not controlled by a sovereign state. This view was then contrasted with the perceptions of human nature and government prevailing in the High Middle Ages. I sought to show the great significance of friendship and love in these contexts. The intention was not to study the concepts as explicit phenomena in themselves. Instead they have served as a framework for a deeper understanding of broad social, political, and ideological fields.

Medieval society was essentially different in many ways from the political and social structure of early modern Europe. The absence of a state authority meant that people's security was dependent on horizontal and vertical bonds between individuals and collectives. Besides communities such as the kindred and the household, friendships also had an important function in organizing society. They influenced not just medieval people's social environment but also their political culture. In this book I have studied how these conditions were related to the spiritual beliefs and the mental world of the period. The ideology of friendship has been the running theme, linking the political perspective with the approach of the history of mentalities.

Friendship and love had a prominent role for classical and medieval thinkers when they interpreted society and their social surroundings. In the first chapter I discussed how the classical philosophers and the Christian theologians of late antiquity viewed the relationship. Friendship, according to these thinkers, was the foundation on which society should be built. It was also a model for the virtuous person in search of spiritual and intellectual union with his equals, who ought to work together for the good of society. These values were passed on to the Middle Ages. The second chapter examined how two social groups – the clerical elite and the secular aristocracy – legitimized their positions in society by invoking the ideals and symbolism of friendship. These ideas played a major role in making meaning because they helped to create and manifest social identity.

The third chapter mainly dealt with the performative and symbolic expressions of friendship. Ritually sworn alliances reflected a sacred order and served as models for righteous political action. In the final chapter I discussed how friendship was used as an ideological instrument to legitimize power and lordship in twelfth-century Scandinavia. A central question was how the kings went about establishing a new idea of Christian lordship in a society with a group culture. Friendship and love were a part of this culture's norms and values. The prince thus endeavoured to act in accordance with these views.

1.2 *Friendship and Legitimation*

Traditional analyses of power presuppose the existence of a fixed political structure controlled by a public authority. The problems involve explaining how this organization is governed, and this can be done by investigating how the other parts of the structure are dominated and managed. In the High Middle Ages, however, there were no static political structures. Government was only to a small extent an exercise of institutional power. Lordship was dependent on bilateral personal bonds, meaning that power could not be derived from a centre. It was thus a dynamic structure where the political constellations were constantly being reshaped as social relations changed.

This book has therefore applied a strategic perspective, studying how power was practised at different levels in the social organization. I have discussed how power was created, exercised, maintained, and recreated via horizontal and vertical bonds of friendship. In these contexts different ideologies played an important part in justifying actions and political order. I have not just studied the ideologies themselves as a means to legitimize lordship or the position of social groups, but have also discussed how the ideas may have been implemented in practice. The theoretical and methodological approach was to analyse friendship as a total social phenomenon where the interaction between spiritual, social, and political elements was in focus. Power acted on different planes within these spheres, which means that it has not been possible to proceed from a specific definition of the concept of ideology.

When Cicero explains the term *amicitia* as “an accord in all things, human and divine, conjoined with mutual goodwill and affection” he thus views friendship as a phenomenon comprising emotions, social and political relations, and spiritual ideas. The bond is thus, according to Cicero, both spiritual and pragmatic in character. This was also true in the High Middle Ages. The clerical elite created identity and solidarity by using codes in their written communication which revolved about spiritual friendship. This language was not just a way to express affinity but also a symbolic capital, which was employed strategically to create social networks that were used for rational purposes.

Friendship also served as an ideal for the secular aristocracy in their endeavour to assert their own exclusiveness in relation to the princely power, to other social groups, and in the internal competition within the aristocracy. Spiritual friendship united kindred spirits whose inner qualities made them suited to governing. This was the case, for example, with Saxo Grammaticus’ political role models, such as Bishop William and Svend Estridsen or Bishop Absalon and King Valdemar. The aristocratic literature, however, also emphasizes a Ciceronian ideal, highlighting personal qualities such as energy and strength. In this context strong horizontal friendship alliances symbolize power and competence in the political arena. In the last books of *Gesta Danorum* this ideal of pragmatic friendship is primarily represented by magnates belonging to the Skjalm clan.

The Valdemarian kings strove for hierarchical power, which may seem incompatible with friendship. Although the diplomas expressed the ideology of the sovereign lord, the real conditions did not match this to any great extent. Royal power worked at different levels, partly through the way the Valdemarians portrayed themselves as both lords and friends to the aristocracy and the people. They were then acting in line with established socio-religious patterns which they used to their own advantage. These structures included

phenomena such as brotherhood, gift exchange, sacral order, and vertical bonds of friendship. All these elements could be employed to create solidarity and collective support for the Valdemarian dynasty and Christian kingship by the grace of God.

1.3 *Friendship and Structural Changes*

Both research on the history of mentalities and political anthropology have been criticized for their inability to explain historical change. In this study, however, I have discussed how friendship was used during the major transformation of society that took place in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. How a researcher chooses to explain historical change depends very much on how he or she interprets the concept of structure. The central questions then are: What is structure? How do structures change? How do the actors relate to the structure and how can they be affected?

In this study I have chosen not to weigh down the account with any profound theoretical discussions of structure. Attentive readers will no doubt realize that the theory of friendship as a total social phenomenon also comprises an interpretation of the actor's relationship to the structure. The reasoning about the interaction between the different spheres and the thesis that we cannot make a clear distinction between spiritual and pragmatic friendship means that the bond is set in a structural context. The interpretation of friendship as a total social phenomenon means that the relationship is structurally, culturally, and ideologically conditioned.

The different figures in the book illustrating the societal functions of friendship may at first sight seem like structural functionalism in character. But these are not fixed systems trying to stay in balance. When it comes to the question of what is structure, I view it as a cultural phenomenon that is not static but dynamic. Structures are always in constant change. Reorganization can be done through influence from actors using different constituents of the structure and transferring them to new contexts. The American historian William H. Sewell promotes the concept of "agency" as an explanation for changes in structures. Being an agent means that a person, for various reasons, is capable of exercising some control over the social relations of which he or she is a part, which in turn entails an ability to change them.¹ For the purposes of the present study, this means that the social relationship, friendship, is a total social phenomenon

1 W.H. Sewell, 2005b, p. 158. According to Sewell, "agency" stands for "the actor's capacity to reinterpret and mobilize an array of resources in terms of cultural schemas other than those that initially constituted the array." W.H. Sewell, 2005b (1st ed. 1992), p. 157.

that is part of a movable structure. Ideologies have to be grounded in this structure if they are to have any meaning.

In classical antiquity the Stoics and Roman philosophers transferred Greek thinkers' ideas about friendship to universal spiritual and public political contexts. The church fathers of late antiquity adapted this system of ideas to a Christian context. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries ideologies of friendship were used to create identity and to legitimize power. For representatives of the ecclesiastical aristocracy, friendship was the prime social bond. It was therefore important to create intellectual networks through correspondence by letter. In the High Middle Ages these formations were crucial for building up the power positions of the clergy, which meant that through time they formed a new elite in society. They had thus changed the social structure.

In the performative political culture, the director of the rituals could affect the structure, for example, by incorporating new elements in the rituals or transferring them to new contexts. A mediator often enjoyed very high status in the medieval sources. This can be explained in terms of the control he exercised over social relations and the fact that it was ultimately his words that made the performative act come into force. Another strategy that was applied to achieve influence in the social and spiritual sphere was giving gifts. Kings and chieftains held sumptuous feasts where they showered the guests with gifts to ensure their loyalty. In this way they were able to acquire a key position in the socio-political exchange. One example where gift exchange was also part of the spiritual sphere is the efforts of the Valdemarian kings to belong to the brotherhoods of the group culture. This gave them increased authority in the country's communities. Through the saint's cult with its spiritual gift exchange they were able to transfer the values, norms, rituals, and collective bonds of guild culture to a new context. They thereby affected social relations, which led to the rise of a more hierarchical political structure. As regards power relations in twelfth-century Scandinavia, then, it seems more relevant to discuss this in terms of transformation and adaptation rather than just considering the problem of continuity/discontinuity.

1.4 *Friendship as Ideology and Culture*

William H. Sewell does not discuss the relationship between ideology and practice in connection with the concept of "agency" and changing structures. If we proceed from the theory of friendship as a total social phenomenon, however, influence over this relationship can also help the agent to possess the ability to gain a hearing for an ideology that can be used to affect the structure in a direction that is to his benefit. Sewell has however studied the concept of *culture* in detail. He does not interpret culture as a static, autonomous system but as a

performative term associated with practice. Culture is a sphere of practical activity, constantly being produced and reproduced by historical actors, employing various symbols to create meaning and communication. Sewell argues that culture can be viewed as both system and practice. Users of culture often establish a semiotic community by perceiving the same forms of opposites, and thus they can mutually engage in meaningful symbolic action. This enables them to use the “grammar” of the system to produce comprehensible statements. This means that the members of a semiotic community are capable not just of grasping statements produced according to a symbolic code but also of using the system by implementing it in practice.² The various philosophical association of the Greeks, Rome’s educated senators, learned medieval clerics, the authors of courtly culture, and the scribes of the royal courts were all intellectual groups that formed semiotic communities.

The classical and high medieval discourse of friendship can thus be interpreted as an example of how culture is used in practice. A culture that idealized true friendship developed in the homosocial environments of the ancient philosophers, the medieval clerical elite, and the secular aristocracy. On a foundation of models from classical and late antiquity, churchmen in the eleventh and twelfth centuries built up a culture of friendship in writing and in everyday social interaction. Something similar happened in the courtly and military milieu of the secular aristocracy, where friendship was an important symbolic expression that was used to create meaning and communication.

Sewell’s view of culture as practice comes close to the function of the friendship discourse. The complex of ideas stood for the creation of meaning, symbols, and values in social life. They therefore had to act in collaboration with prevailing beliefs if they were to have any effect. When the Swedish jarl Birger Brosa, in a letter to the people of Värmland, calls them “God’s friends”, the formula can be interpreted as an expression of a Christian ideology of lordship, but also as a way to use culture in practice, in the form of a symbolic language that appealed to the recipients. Descriptions by Dudo of St Quentin, Galbert of Bruges, and Saxo Grammaticus of friendships established through ritual have an ideological stamp by reflecting a sacred Christian order. These descriptions can simultaneously be regarded as examples of how the authors make and use culture in practice.

Cultures, as Sewell views them, are in constant change. The use of the symbolism of friendship in language and rituals can thus be interpreted as a cultural strategy. The aim of these strategies was not always primarily to achieve

2 W.H. Sewell, 2005b (1st ed. 1992), pp. 76, 86 ff.

uniformity; it was a way to organize difference.³ Cicero holds up an exclusive group of political leaders whose noble bonds of friendship were a result of them being attracted to each other because they were each other's equals in virtue. The twelfth-century clerical elite secluded itself intellectually from other groups in society through the code language of friendship. An example is Abbot William's letter to the monk Stephen where he reveals the law of true friendship. It consists of the firm bond between souls that also entails community in the Holy Spirit. The abbot thus initiates Stephen in the mystery of friendship, while simultaneously emphasizing that an outsider cannot share in this good, because a person who is flesh with no spirit cannot understand what belongs to God. This means that spiritual friendship is reserved for a small group of initiates.

The secular aristocracy associated the virtues of friendship with gracious behaviour and a noble inner man. Saxo Grammaticus' composition of *Gesta Danorum* can be interpreted as a cultural strategy aiming to portray a specific elite as being particularly qualified to govern. At the same time, the Danish kings utilized culture to create a hegemony to which other groups in society had to adapt their meaning systems. The Valdemarians adopted the European cult of the saint-king, not only to give their own dynasty a special radiance but also to establish vertical bonds of friendship. This strategy can thus be viewed as ideology translated into practice, but also as the practical use of culture.

Cultures, according to Sewell, express contradictions just as often as consistencies. As examples he mentions the Christian trinity, where the father represents authoritative and hierarchical orthodoxy. The son stands for loving egalitarianism and grace, while the Holy Spirit expresses ecstatic spontaneity.⁴ The culture of friendship in the High Middle Ages can also be read as a symbolic trinity of contradictions used in different contexts. Friendship could be paternal, protective, and authoritarian, and thus associated with subordination and patron-client relations. But friendship could also represent a horizontal relationship between equals who loved each other because of their shared love of Christ. Finally, friendship was also a mystery in which the union of souls formed a community with the Holy Spirit. All these cultural applications had a spiritual basis, but they were simultaneously used in practice for different purposes.

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3 On the role of cultural strategies in creating inequality, see W.H. Sewell, 2005b (1st ed. 1992), pp. 90 ff.

4 W.H. Sewell, 2005b (1st ed. 1992), p. 89.

We have thus reached the end of this book. The conclusion is that we cannot draw a sharp dividing line between pragmatic and spiritual friendship. In classical antiquity, as in the High Middle Ages, the bond functioned both to structure and to constitute society. To understand this we must grasp the significance of the relationship for social order and political control. These structures are only comprehensible when we gain insight into the individual's beliefs, thoughts, norms, and ideals.

If this study had only examined the doctrine of friendship and love, it could have been designed as a charming story about man's inherent good qualities. The intellectual discourse concerning the union of souls and the visions of a better society would then have dominated the account. The power perspective and the analyses of practical applications of the bond of friendship, however, have made it necessary to paint the picture in sombre colours. In this context friendship can be associated with conflict, violence, coercion, and exploitation. These phenomena were a natural part of everyday life for medieval people, and therefore amicable trust was adapted to prevailing power relations.

The self-preservation instinct and self-interest were often essential for survival in the insecurity of the Middle Ages, but it was not the sovereign state that was the counterbalance to anarchy. During this period the totality – kingship and the Christian collective – rested on the foundation of friendship, while the relationship between its parts – the social organizations, the individuals, and the political culture – was regulated through ties of friendship. Parallel to these bonds there were, of course, a great many other relations of great significance, but if we want to arrive at a deeper understanding of how this society was built up, as historians we can no longer shrug our shoulders and say: "Friendship, so what?"

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